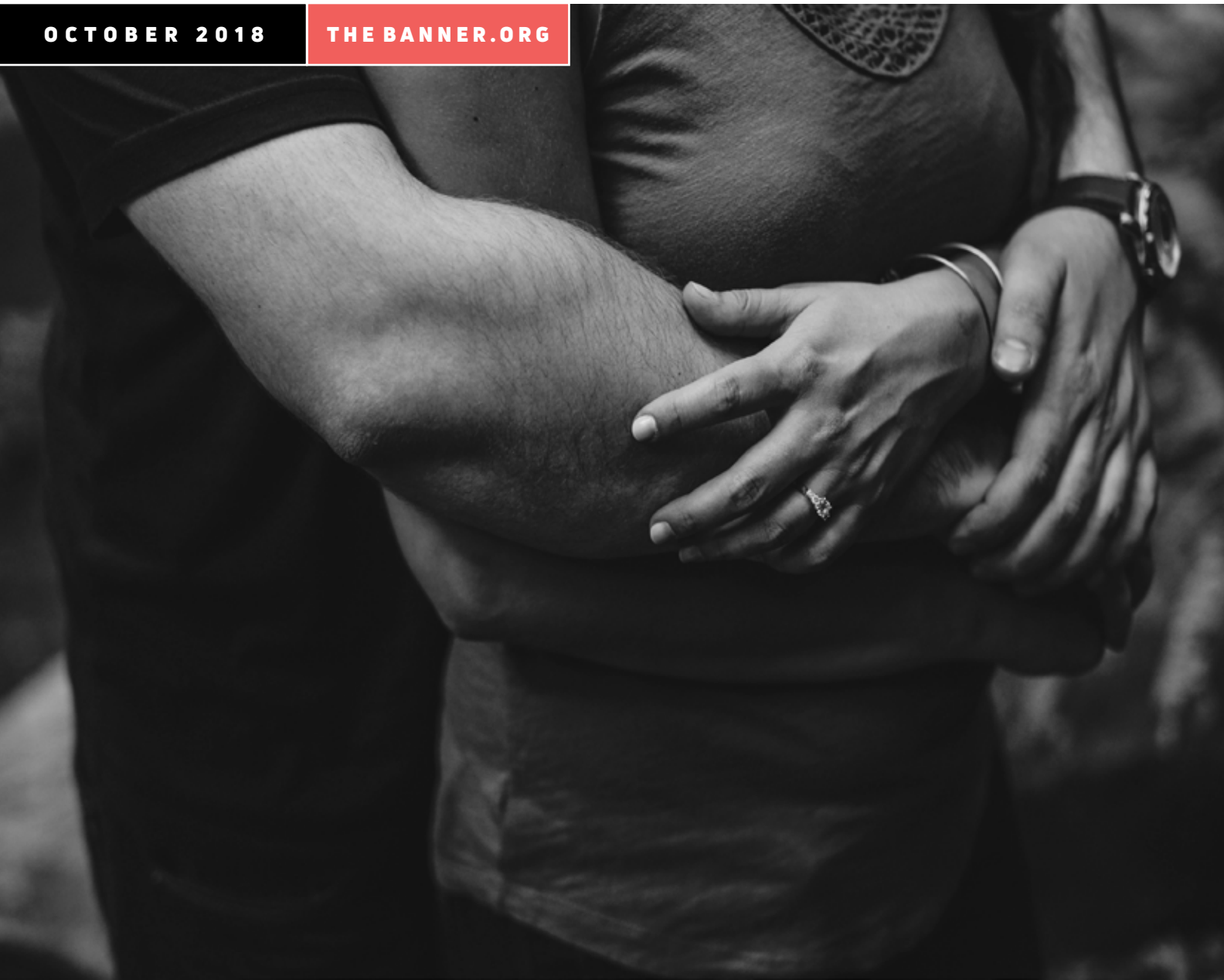


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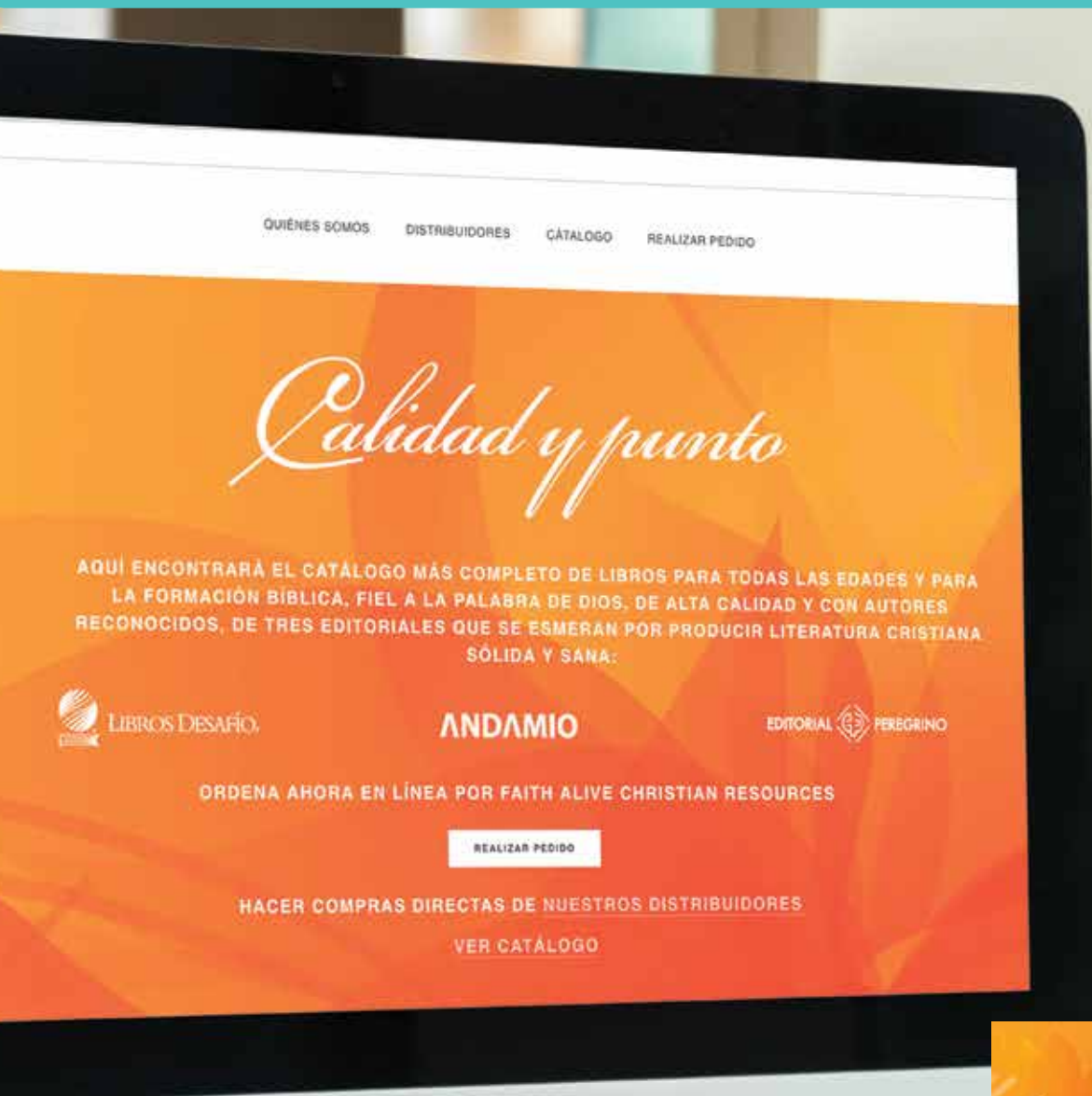
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- » As I Was Saying: My Friend Lenny

A blessed Thanksgiving Day to our Canadian readers!



FEATURES



500 Million Websites CAN Be Wrong: What Every Young Person Should Know about Porn

Aaron Baart // The day you first tell someone about your struggle with porn is the day you first move toward healing.



Prayers of the Infertile: Longing, Hope, and Solidarity

Cory B. Willson // How does our Christian faith enable us to carry on when hope seems lost?



Cover: Prayers of the Infertile: Longing, Hope, and Solidarity. Photo by Kaitlyn Baker / Unsplash

NEWS

14 A Safe Place to Share

17 Portrait Project Connects Generations Through Faith and Art

18 Do Synods Remember? A Look at Ministry Shares

COLUMNS

7 Editorial: When Christian ‘Celebrities’ Fall
Shiao Chong // What do we do when someone we admire is tarnished by an egregious sin?

8 Reply All

9 Vantage Point: Holy Communion
Henk Ottens // I can’t help wondering if the pendulum has swung too far.

12 Big Questions
What does it mean to “give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s”?

31 Discover: A-maize-ing Corn
Christin Baker // What is a vegetable, a grain, and a fruit all at the same time?

35 Faith Matters: The Belgic Confession
Karin Maag // How the Belgic Confession still speaks to us today.

37 The Other 6: Loving Small
Shawn Sikkema // Loving small is doing small things with great love.

38 Mixed Media: Steering a Course for Artificial Intelligence

40 Cross Examination: What Does It Mean to Be Biblical?
Mike Wagenman // Being biblical is only possible if our goal is to be a faithful and dynamic disciple of Jesus.

41 Word Play

63 Still: The Kindness of Women
Melissa Kuipers // These women give with a grace that makes me feel unashamed to receive.

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



The Journey of Inclusion

Chris Meehan // Destination Church in St. Thomas, Ont., is intentional about including all people in its community regardless of their perceived abilities.

26 The View from Here: Living a Life of Unity
Steve Timmermans // As I think about enfolding people with disabilities into our churches, I am reminded that this too is a 24/7 task.

BANNER

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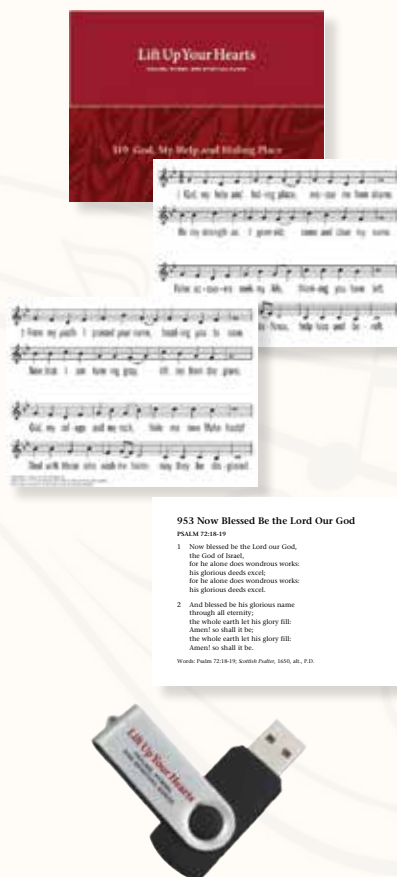
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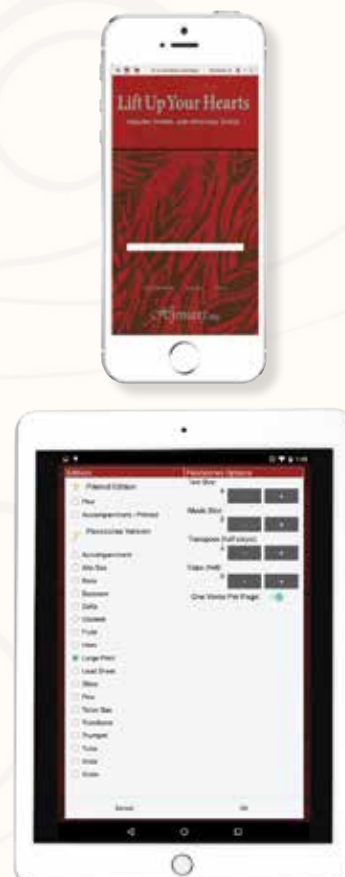
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When Christian 'Celebrities' Fall

We cannot have
double standards,
blame victims,
or make excuses,
even for one of
our "good guys."



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

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

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

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READERS MAY HAVE HEARD of multiple sexual harassment allegations against Bill Hybels, former pastor of Willow Creek, a suburban Chicago megachurch. In August, Willow Creek's entire board of elders resigned, confessing they failed to handle the allegations appropriately, failed to hold Hybels accountable, and had been "blinded by their faith in their founding pastor." I own a number of Bill Hybels' many bestselling books and have attended a satellite for one of his Global Leadership Summits. I believe many Christian Reformed pastors and leaders have done the same. We learned much from Hybels and were eager to apply his leadership concepts and seeker-friendly methods in our own contexts. Many of us are now asking ourselves, "How do we respond to this?" What do we do when someone we admire is tarnished by an egregious sin? Do we burn his books and boycott the summits?

Hybels is not the first Christian "celebrity" in history to be tainted. Martin Luther King Jr., John Howard Yoder, and Karl Barth, to name just a few, were all implicated in some sex scandal or other. And what about sins besides sexual sins? For instance, what do we do with Abraham Kuyper's racist ideas? These Christian leaders were all influential theologians and thinkers. Do we reject all of their work as hopelessly tarnished? How do we deal with our disappointments? What do we learn from all this?

I am saddened whenever I hear of these tragedies. They tarnish our Christian witness, hurt people, and potentially create stumbling blocks to faith, including the faith of the victims of abuse. Do people find God's message credible if the messengers are not?

These events remind me that we are all sinners. They are cautionary tales to take heed lest we fall. What preventative steps can we take to ensure they don't happen again? How do we notice the signs of abuse of power? What kinds of systems, structures, or practices foster such abuse? How do we change them?

Such abuses are almost always abetted by others' silence and by turning a blind eye. Do we perpetuate abuse when we have blind loyalty and trust for our admired "heroes"? We cannot have double standards, blame victims, or make excuses, even for one of our "good guys."

We also need to avoid the extremes of defending or demonizing these fallen leaders, either by denying or ignoring their failings and blaming the victims or by denying anything good from their legacy.

Justice and mercy must always be held together in tension. Justice without mercy can be harsh, legalistic, and vengeful. Mercy without justice can be permissive, leave those in authority unaccountable, and abet injustice.

An all-or-nothing tribal loyalty feeds into both extremes. We cannot afford a tribal loyalty that only gives mercy to our tribe's heroes or leaders when they fail and only doles out justice to our enemies. That is a recipe for abetting injustice and abuse of power. We cannot afford a loyalty that accepts all from our tribe and rejects all from the enemy, as if our tribe's ideas are flawless. That is a recipe for tyranny.

Our primary loyalty should always be to God, not to any human being, institution, or country. Not even to any theological tradition. We must never confuse allegiance to God with allegiance to any of these flawed entities, good as they may be. God commands us to love our neighbors, enemies included (Matt. 5:43-48).

We are called to sift for golden truths from sinful mud. Sometimes we forget. 



REPLY ALL

Empty Pews

As much as I lament the decline of the institutional church (Big Questions, “Missional Living,” Sept. 2018), I also lament the fact that we are still stuck in our old ways of trying to get people to church instead of teaching our own to BE the church wherever God has placed them—to live as disciples and to open their homes and hearts to their neighbors or coworkers. If we do this well, we will have no need of agencies that facilitate church plants. What we need now is not more churches, but for our laity to live like the disciples of the early church—bold, excited about their faith, and able to model and articulate it authentically. This way churches will grow organically in people’s homes and offices. Then maybe folks will attend church to celebrate what goes on outside of it.

» Chris Pullenayegem // online comment

It’s been about 16 years since I stepped into a Christian Reformed church and 15 since I’ve been baptized (Big Questions, “Missional Living,” Sept. 2018). I’ve done the outreach thing, the Alpha thing, and the guilt thing, and I’ve finally acknowledged that I’ve been right all along—there is no magic formula to get people into the pews. Frankly, I stopped worrying about that and moved on to learn how to engage the culture with my faith in Christ. I care about the spiritual growth of those who go

to church so they can see the marvelous opportunities all around to speak and act God’s wisdom into the lives of others. Those of us who were never here when the church was full aren’t really missing anything because a half-empty church is all we know. There are people who engage in worship on Sunday and wonder what’s next. Is church all there is? I ended up going to seminary to get my answers, but I wish the church had been prepared to help me transform and find my place serving the culture I live in rather than waiting in the pews.

» Victoria Shipmaker // online comment

Religious Freedom

The decision by the Supreme Court of Canada in relation to accreditation of law school graduates from Trinity Western University is controversial for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the power/authority accorded to self-regulating professional bodies (“Joining with Other Faiths for the Sake of Religious Freedom,” Sept. 2018). I am not commenting in order to debate the decision. It sounds an awful lot like you wish to transform Canadian society back to a point where LGBTQ people are denied access not only in churches and other religious institutions but also in and by public or civil institutions—under the banner of diversity and justice, no less. This and other pieces by Christians in North America who lament the erosion of religious freedoms sound a lot like a lament for the loss of having a privileged position in civil society whereby their own views on marriage (exclusively for heterosexual persons) no longer carry the day.

» Alyce Dunnewold // online comment

Space to Serve

Thank you for writing “Creating Space to Serve” (Sept. 2018) and incorporating good questions. It is timely and true. I really like the image that comes to mind when you say, “In a world that molds us inward, we need to push back to turn outward.” It’s not effortless to “push back.” I need to do it more.

» Denise Posie // online comment

Synod Confronts Abuse

Your coverage of the abuse issue is excellent (“Synod 2018 Confronts Abuse,” July/Aug. 2018). “Too often we hurt the vulnerable among us” is right on. We have seen some serious “overlordship” and abuse by some CRC councils and classes; when some of these institutions were proven wrong in their handling of certain accused, they would blame others and not show remorse or sorrow for their own sin, and they often failed to bring compassion and restoration to those who were hurt. It is a good thing sister Bev Sterk brought the serious matter of abuse to synod’s attention so that some constructive healing and renewal can take place. May the 30 percent of our churches who have not yet participated in abuse prevention and care come on board.

» John Van Hemert // Lynden, Wash.

Holy Communion

Uncomfortable Conversation

Yes! Thank you for writing this article ("Uncomfortable Conversation," July/Aug. 2018). It's like a breath of fresh air: so welcome, and also challenging. Safe Church (a ministry of the Christian Reformed Church) joins in the struggle to help create safe spaces in our congregations where stories can be told, where people can listen and learn with compassion and empathy. It's in these places, when we are honest with ourselves and with each other, that our transforming God is able to do his best work. Lord, have mercy.

» Bonnie Nicholas // online comment

Late-Night Church

I read and re-read to family members the inspiring narrative "Late-Night Church" (June 2018) by Rod Hugen of the Village Church in Arizona. It drives home the fact that God looks at the heart of a person, not his outward appearance. We can all learn from this message.

» Tina Vandenburg // Dundas, Ont.

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MY EARLIEST MEMORIES of Holy Communion are set in a small church in rural Netherlands. In that place and in those times, the pious took the apostle Paul's injunctions regarding righteous living at face value.

The preparatory sermon always included Paul's dire warning about eating and drinking judgment on oneself. Folks fastened on predestination, puzzled over and trembled at its implications. Election and reprobation were staple topics at the Sunday dinner of pot roast and potatoes. But unlike the hearty vittles, severe doctrine proved resistant to life-sustaining digestion.

Pauline warnings meant that very few found themselves worthy to partake of the Lord's Supper. In those early days of my childhood, the communion table served as the gathering place for those worthy few who dared to leave the pew and go forward to sit around it. When the minister gave the invitation, they paused deferentially before rising and, heads bowed, made their way to the front. The small table had more than enough chairs; a second seating was seldom necessary.

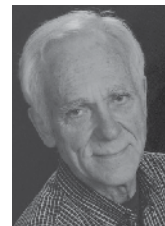
During my youth in Minnesota, things got more relaxed. The preparatory sermon was still preached and the entire Lord's Supper form read from the back of the *Psalter Hymnal*. Folks still agonized over election and predestination, but most ate the bread and drank the wine—or so it seemed. It was hard to tell as the communal cup moved through the pews. I could only observe the solemn ritual. There were still catechism questions to answer and faith in my Lord and Savior to profess before I could partake. From early childhood, our parents and other authorities had made it clear that eating and drinking the Lord's

Election and reprobation were staples at the Sunday dinner of pot roast and potatoes.

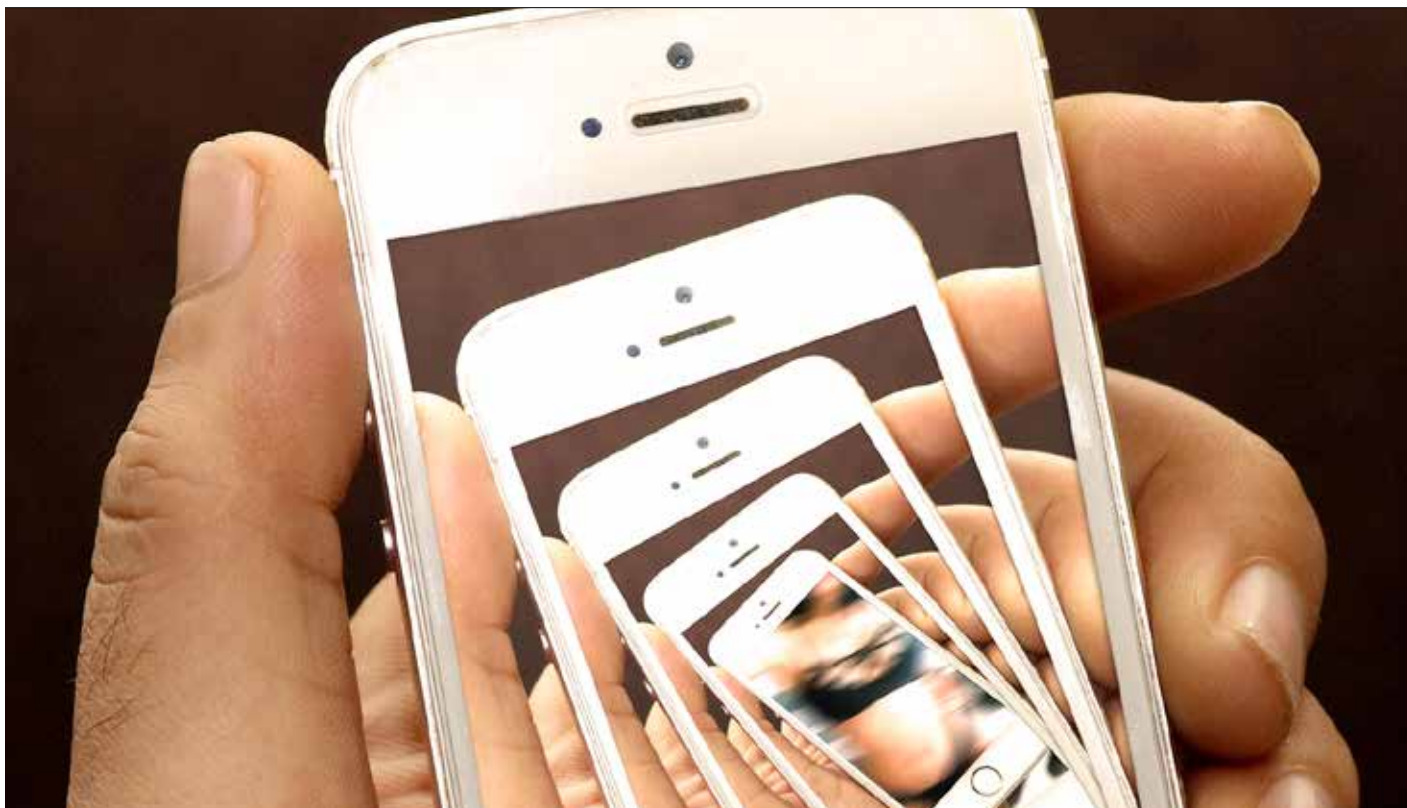
body and blood in an unworthy manner carried consequences.

Now that I am old, I see kids amble up the aisle with their parents, take a piece of bread, and dip it into the grape juice. Surely they're too young to grasp the profound symbolism of table, beaker, and chalice. I wonder if they are able to see beyond the bread and juice the mysteries of incarnation and atonement. Perhaps it doesn't really matter.

But I can't help wondering if the pendulum has swung too far from the suffocating practice of my parents' generation to the seemingly *laissez-faire* attitude prevalent in some churches today. It's heartwarming to watch a little child take part in reenacting the ancient and meaningful ritual our Lord instituted. I just hope we don't lose sight of the earth-shaking significance of Holy Communion or dismiss altogether Paul's cautionary words. **B**



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



500 Million Websites Can Be Wrong: What Every Young Person Should Know about Porn

Aaron Baart

A good friend once told me, “When it comes to dealing with the hard things in life, you either pay now or you pay later, but when you pay later, you always pay with interest.” In other words, it’s worth dealing with stuff—even the hard stuff—as it happens. Otherwise, when we finally do get around to dealing with past hurts, the problem becomes like interest: it’s compounded.

My friend’s advice was a valuable piece of wisdom that has proven itself repeatedly with time. But it’s also a truth I’m confronted with regularly in the pain-filled stories I listen to in my office as dean of chapel at a Christian college. Students recount their sexual experiences from high

school or even earlier. They share their stories and they cry, wishing they had a time machine so they could undo the decisions they made then because they had no idea how badly they were going to hurt now.

These days, most stories I hear of this stripe have to do with pornography. Virtually every young person is exposed to it and, from what I’ve heard from students, most adolescents have seen hardcore porn before they finish middle school. Yes, hardcore porn. Most kids will already have seen more sexually before they finish middle school than anyone should ever see in a lifetime (including but not limited to group sex, bestiality, rape, and incest). Worse yet, they will have experienced all of this digitally before having experienced real-life

butterflies swirl in their stomach as they reach out to hold someone’s hand for the first time, feel the nervousness before a first date, or experience the thrill of a first kiss.

Porn before puppy love.
That’s today’s reality.

Our exposure to porn is causing our sexual education to occur backward: We experience digitally what we don’t even have the vocabulary yet to articulate. Profound, often hardcore digital experiences precede even the simplest of real-life ones. This places us at a watershed moment in history. And, let’s be honest, we have no idea yet as to the full impact of these tectonic cultural shifts. Perhaps porn is this generation’s version of smoking—we intuitively know it’s

killing us; we just don't yet have all the science to back that knowledge up.

But as people living out the story of Scripture, we shouldn't be all that surprised. Consider the impact of the first-ever sin: "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid'" (Gen. 3:8-10).

The first place we felt the effects of sin was related to our sexuality: Nakedness. Shame. Hiding. And when it comes to our sexuality, we've been hiding ever since.

The most vulnerable part of our being, the part most susceptible to the effects of sin and the pain it causes, is our sexuality. Yet our sexuality is a vital and vibrant part of who we are, an unparalleled part of our ability to love and to be loved. Our sexuality is nothing short of an expression of the image of God within us.

But for many of us, it's also a source of great pain and ongoing temptation. It's hard to talk about sex, and in Christian circles, we tend to err on the side of silence. As a result, many of us Christians grow up with a split personality when it comes to our sexuality. We have our Christian self, and we have our sexual self—and for the most part, they aren't talking to each other. Worse yet, we imagine that God doesn't like the sexual part of us. When we think and live like this, it's impossible to experience the fullness of redemption because a significant part of our identity hasn't even begun a conversation with God about what it means to be redeemed.

Christians need to stop acting as if Adam and Eve snuck out of the bushes all red-faced, out of breath, and giggling, "Guess what we just figured out, God!" As if sexuality wasn't part of God's creation. As if

this wasn't part of God's good design. As if God doesn't have answers to the important questions we ask.

As a campus pastor, for eight years I've been listening to college students cry through stories of sexual pain as they wake up one day and realize that what they once considered "dabbling" or have rationalized away they now can't

Most adolescents
have seen
hardcore porn
before they finish
middle school.

quit. They can't undo what they've seen. They can't stop what they're doing. They're addicted, even if they'd never use that word to describe it.

I hate the pain that porn causes. I hate the relationships it holds hostage. I hate the way it stunts our maturity. And I hate how the evil one is winning with the very lie that porn sells. As one of my college students said, "Trying to satisfy my sexual cravings with pornography was like trying to drink salt water when I was thirsty."

Here's what I'm learning every young person wishes they could go back and tell his or her 11-year-old self:

» How you perceive God matters greatly. At the risk of sounding reductionist, most people when confronted with sin see God in one of two ways: God is either angry at them or angry for them. The first perpetuates shame and guilt and only compounds the problem; the second points to a cross meant to deal with all sin, including

viewing porn, long before the world even knew what it was.

» You can't take out of a grave on Sunday what you don't nail to a cross on Friday. Own your struggle with pornography. Name it. Deal with it. Hate it. Heal from it. Jesus didn't come to die for the best of who you are, or for your future, imaginary self; he came for the worst of who you are, porn and all. Leverage the strength of the cross and resurrection. Hold out hope. Don't be satisfied with anything less than restoration in Christ Jesus. He literally died to give you that chance.

» Risk being vulnerable. The day you first tell someone about your struggle with porn is the day you first move toward healing. Yes, it's difficult, but vulnerability is also powerful. It's the currency by which intimacy is purchased, and no one can love what they don't know. Theologian Chuck De Groat calls vulnerability the antidote to shame—so be vulnerable. Tell someone about your struggle. The moment you do, you'll be closer to healing than ever before.

» You were created a sexual being and a follower of Jesus. These two realities belong together. You need to know that God is enamored with you—all of you. Your sexuality wasn't a mistake. It's a part of God's perfect plan. It might be broken now, but genuine discipleship might be more about living in the tension of your temptations than the resolution you may not fully find until the other side of glory. **B**



Aaron Baart is dean of chapel at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. He and his wife, Nicole, offer workshops and training at schools and churches on grace-based, biblical sexuality.

BIG QUESTIONS

Stewardship

What does it mean to “give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s”? How might that shape our attitude as Christians toward paying taxes or supporting the government?

Such a subtle answer Jesus gives! The question (Matt. 22:20-22; Mark 12:16-17; Luke 20:24-26) is whether it is lawful to give taxes to Caesar. Jesus says to “give back” those things that are due to Caesar. So you don’t give taxes to Caesar; you give back to Caesar what is owed.

By adding “and to God what is God’s,” Jesus indicates that not everything is due to Caesar. Coins and tax payments are appropriately Caesar’s for what Caesar provides. But some things, namely worship and adoration, are appropriate only for God.

I’m reminded of a practice in some ballparks where a fan who catches an opposing team’s home run ball will throw it back onto the field. When the ball reaches the stands, a chant of “Throw it back!” starts, and there are loud cheers when the ball flies back. Jesus is saying that if you don’t appreciate what Caesar does for you, why would you hold on to money that has Caesar’s image and a claim of divinity inscribed on it? Give it back! If you do appreciate what Caesar does for you—roads, sewers, police protection, economic trade around the Mediterranean—why begrudge Caesar what is Caesar’s due? Just remember that God is greater than Caesar, and

don’t give to Caesar what is properly God’s.

In a sermon on the first Sunday after April 15, I once made an offhand comment about the distress caused by paying taxes the previous week. Afterward, a woman chided me for that remark. She said, “I don’t resent paying my taxes, and I don’t think Christians should. The government does wonderful things that make society possible, and if I resent paying taxes I’m only trying to get something for nothing.”

She was right. Sometimes we assume all too readily that taxes are an imposition and never warranted. Christians have a teaching from Jesus regarding the appropriateness of paying taxes toward the legitimate ends of civil government.

Rolf Bouma is pastor of academic ministries at the Campus Chapel in Ann Arbor, Mich., and teaches in the University of Michigan’s Program in the Environment.

Vocation

How do I discern between God’s calling and my own—or even other people’s—sinful ambitions?

It is often difficult to know whether God or sinful ambition is the source of our callings. Because this life

is a struggle between living by God’s Spirit and what Paul calls the “desires of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16), we cannot assume that all strongly felt urges are from God. How do we tell what is of God and what is of sin? There is no easy answer.

We need to test what we feel led to do with God’s commandments. If we feel led to do something clearly condemned by God’s revealed commandments, then the urges we feel are not of God but of our own or others’ sinful desires. But at many important points in life, the complexities of our circumstances and lack of clarity of God’s revealed will make it difficult to know for sure what God is calling us to do. And there are large areas of our lives for which there is no commandment: Should I marry or remain single? Should I marry this person or that person? Should I become an electrician or an office manager? God lays down no law for such matters; these are realms of Christian freedom. The important thing is to do whatever we do for the glory of God and the well-being of our world.

Many Christian communities recommend “discernment” in such situations. To “discern” here means to test, examine, interpret, discover, approve, or demonstrate. Discernment involves a prayerful, Scripture-guided assessment of our gifts, the needs of



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohorquez

our communities and our world, our obligations, and our concrete opportunities. Though it is deeply personal, discernment is also a communal process in which we consult others who know us and the needs of our communities. Discernment is especially needed at important junctures of our lives, when we make pivotal decisions about marriage and family, career and paid work, and special obligations to parents, children, siblings, and friends. Discernment is also needed at transitional stages of the life cycle and of career changes and retirement.

Douglas J. Schuurman is a professor of religion at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.

Church/Bible/Doctrine

In terms of orthodoxy in faith and practice, it seems to me that the Christian Reformed Church has more in common with A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) than with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Shouldn't this be the primary basis on which to pursue unity rather than uniting around historical roots and ethnic identity? Shouldn't we be establishing closer ties with this new denomination?

Let's agree that confessions ("orthodoxy in faith") are at the heart of every denomination and that historical roots and ethnic identity are significant but secondary factors in the pursuit of unity. But here are the facts.

At their constituting convention held in January 2012, ECO Presbyterians decided to adopt as their own the confessions held by the Presbyterian Church (USA). Of these, the only ones in common with the CRC were the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Heidelberg Catechism. The ones the CRC and the RCA have never had

in common with the ECO are the Scots Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession, The Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Theological Declaration of Barmen, and the Confession of 1967. The CRC and the RCA both have three ecumenical creeds—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—along with some contemporary testimonies, one of which (the Belhar Confession) we share. Currently, therefore, we have far more in common with the RCA than with ECO Presbyterians, not just in historical roots and ethnic identity, but confessionally. It is true that the new ECO denomination is currently reviewing which confessions they will retain or adopt, but that is also true of the CRC and the RCA.

I'm not sure what you mean by "orthodoxy in practice." Perhaps it has to do with official positions on some current issues. There may be greater similarities to the ECO there than is the case confessionally.

I was delighted to note in the *Agenda for Synod 2018* that Executive Director Steven Timmermans met with ECO leaders and that discussions between our denominations are continuing. Yes, we should be seeking closer ties!

Henry De Moor is professor emeritus of church polity at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich. He's the author of *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*.

Digital Life

My kid sends me text messages that I can usually figure out. But seriously, how hard should it be for her to write a complete sentence?

Three or four years ago, I started to notice people beginning their spoken sentences with "so"—as in, "So I was just sitting there minding my own business." Once you pick up on it, you hear it everywhere. Words and the way we use them

change, and sometimes that change is driven by technology.

The shortcoming of our current devices is that they can't capture the subtle intonations and body language we use with each other in person. Trying to do so would take forever if we're typing on our phones with only our thumbs! So we compensate. We add emojis and take liberties with the way we write. Some people—especially those we've labeled "millennials"—are way beyond the fairly self-explanatory "idk" (I don't know) or "imho" (in my humble opinion).

For example, the personal pronoun "I" is sometimes left lowercase to play down the person's sense of self. To show excitement, punctuation is left out entirely. When punctuation or capitalization *are* used, the writer is expressing finality or something less than positive (as in "okay then if You say so."). A new shorthand is emerging—shorthand with feeling that attempts to build community in an increasingly virtual world.

But just because the "cool kids" are doing it doesn't mean the rest of us have to. Every time I call my oldest son I begin with, "Morgen, this is Dad"—to which he replies, "Yeah, I can see that." Of course I know that he can see who is calling on his phone, but I'll never get tired of hearing myself claim him as my son.

Bottom line: Unless it's an English assignment or a résumé, stay flexible about how your daughter communicates. Just be glad she's sending you anything at all.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of ministry support services of the Christian Reformed Church and art director of *The Banner*. He is a member of Covenant CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Online dating seems to be more acceptable than ever. What's been your experience, good or bad? Tell Dean about it at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.

A Safe Place to Share

NEWS

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How are you commemorating the Synod of Dort?

In November it will be 400 years since the Synod of Dort—when delegates from across Reformed Europe met in the Dutch city of Dordrecht in 1618. The synod produced the Canons of Dort, one of our Reformed confessions. The Christian Reformed Church’s 2018 synod (our yearly general gathering) encouraged us to mark the anniversary. In January *The Banner* will have a Faith Matters column on the Canons of Dort, but now we want to know: what is your church or classis (regional group of churches) doing? Send a tip to news@thebanner.org.

Painful stories can be uncomfortable, both to hear and to tell.

A new webpage called “S.O.S. Share Our Stories” aims to make room in the Christian Reformed Church for just those kinds of experiences. The webpage is part of the CRC’s online sharing platform, The Network.

“Amy” was the first person to share her story on the site. A friend of the pastor was abusing her, she writes in “Amy’s Story,” and when she told the pastor, he seemed to disbelieve her.

“For a long time I was desperate for my story to be heard and believed,” Amy told *The Banner*. “Through my healing journey I’ve learned that my story is true and important, regardless of whether or not anyone believes me.”

Safe Church Ministry of the CRC was created in 1994 to “equip congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response.” Recent strategic planning for the ministry identified “the need for people to be able to share their stories,” according to director Bonnie Nicholas.

“We do need a safe place to share,” said Nicholas. “I wish it could happen in churches. We haven’t figured that out yet.”

Beyond giving abuse survivors a safe place to be heard, the website’s purpose is also “to help people understand the experience of abuse and how they can come alongside in ways that are helpful,” she added.

Survivors like Amy are hoping people will listen: “I share my story in order to bring awareness to the ways abuse and assault are mishandled in the CRC so that changes can be made, and to encourage CRC members and leaders to support survivors of abuse, even if only by believing them,” she said. Over 300 people have viewed her story.

“The ongoing failure of some classes and congregations to implement safe church practices” was discussed at synod, the CRC’s annual leadership gathering (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 476). Each classis (regional group of churches) is encouraged to have a safe church coordinator (volunteer or paid), although to date only 40 percent of classes do. Safe Church Ministry offers a \$1,500 stipend to help classes establish this position.

Nicholas recently asked Safe Church coordinators to elicit stories for the new website from those who have experienced abuse, even if the stories happened a while ago.

“We offer this to people,” she said. “Sometimes it takes a while to be able to share a story. Sometimes right in the moment is not the best time.”

Anyone in the Christian Reformed Church is invited to submit a story of abuse to the Safe Church Ministry by email to bnicholas@crcna.org.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Big Wins with Community Bingo



Credit: Shanna Grigoletti

Mondays are Bingo days at Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Mich. "It's Bingo night—come join us; everyone's a winner," the weekly Facebook post says. The game nights are part of an increased effort to use Calvary's building as a hub or community center.

"There's always been a spirit of being open to people using the building who don't necessarily go to this church," said church administrator John Quist.

At first, the Bingo games were held in the morning, but they became so popular that the church added an evening session. "People come in off the street (to play). It's this huge community now. We're seeing people invite friends, and it's growing," said Shanna Grigoletti, who organizes the games as well as other community-based activities at the church.

Prizes usually consist of non-food personal items that have been donated, such as toilet paper, deodorant, shampoo, and dish soap. Even players without a full line or Bingo card can claim a prize at the end of a round—that's how everyone's a winner.

Other free community-based activities at Calvary include cardio kickboxing and cooking classes, a senior fitness class, and a financial mentoring program sponsored by a local bank. In addition,

two other congregations, including a Reformed Church in America church plant, hold worship services during the week and offer children's programs, Quist said.

Calvary's increased community-based programs grew out of a shared decision by church leadership and members about six years ago to become more intentional about connecting with the surrounding neighborhood. "We try to welcome people as often as possible, in every way possible," pastor Mark Van Drunen said.

A small coffee shop operated by volunteers was the first step in that outreach process, but the list of activities has grown considerably since last fall, Van Drunen said.

The increased use of the building for community activities has gone over well with church members. During annual church retreats, participants in a survey said they liked the fact the building was being used and not sitting empty. Quist said the growth in programming would not have been possible without the help of community members volunteering their time along with church members.

"It's not just about us at all. It's about doing stuff together—collaborative ministry," Quist said.

— Greg Chandler

NOTEWORTHY

Hymn Society Recognizes CRC Scholar

Adam Perez, a member of Kenosha (Wisc.) Christian Reformed Church, was honored by the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada with its Emerging Scholar award in mid-July.

A third-year doctoral student at the Duke University Divinity School in Durham, N.C., Perez received the honor for a paper he presented on the role of the keyboard in the emergence of praise and worship music.



Adam Perez (standing, left) receives the Emerging Scholar Award from Hymn Society director of research Lim Swhee Hong.

Hamilton Cyclist Rides for Team Canada

Kaitlyn Rauwerda, 18, a member of Ancaster (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church and four-time national cycling champion, represented Team Canada in Aigle, Switzerland, at the UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale) Junior Track World Championships in August. Rauwerda placed 10th overall in World Points; her team earned 7th in the Team Pursuit.



Kaitlyn Rauwerda (Second from the front, green jersey)

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IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Ralph D. Baker
1924-2018

Kind, gentle, and self-effacing, Ralph Baker served among the Tiv people in Nigeria for 35 years. Upon hearing of his death on June 29 at the age of 94, the Tiv Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria declared a day of mourning.

When World War II began while Baker was attending Calvin College, he volunteered for the U.S. Army Air Corps and served in England. Afterward he returned to his studies, graduating from Calvin Seminary in 1952. While the Bakers awaited visas to serve overseas, he pastored West Park CRC in Cleveland, Ohio, and Greene Road CRC in Goshen, Ind.

In Nigeria, Baker began as a traveling evangelist. Realizing that his personal outreach was limited, he founded the Benue Bible Institute to train Tiv evangelists. He later turned over its leadership to a Nigerian pastor while he concentrated on writing Tiv Bible commentaries for church leaders. Baker loved music and singing and will be remembered for encouraging the Tiv people to use their native instruments in worship. He retired in 1989.

Baker is survived by Verna, his wife of 69 years; their six children and spouses; 11 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Talk, Walks, and Steady Work: Canadian CRCs on the Journey toward Reconciliation



Across Canada, Christian Reformed churches are engaging in activities and education to help their congregations move toward reconciliation with their Aboriginal and Indigenous neighbors.

“Living the 8th Fire,” a resource put together by the Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee (CAMC) and the Centre for Public Dialogue, has been used recently by a youth group in Halifax, N.S., and in a condensed format by the Northern Alberta Diaconal Conference in Edmonton, Alta.

The Alberta conference had previously shared the program, originally designed as a seven-week study, with other churches and diaconates. “It was really well received, and the people who came and participated really enjoyed it and were quite moved by it,” said Jesse Edgington, facilitator. In order to help other groups present their own program, they decided to condense the material—which includes videos and discussion circles—into a one-day format for a July presentation.

In addition to running the 8th Fire session, Edgington helped organize two reconciliation walks, which he described as acts of remembering and restoration that serve to build positive relationships with Indigenous peoples.

Priya Andrade, who works with CAMC and attends All Nations CRC in Halifax, N.S., co-taught the “Living the 8th Fire” curriculum to her church’s youth group in April. “It was amazing. It blew my mind and opened my heart. It

Participants in a reconciliation walk, partially organized by the Northern Alberta Diaconal Conference.

sounds so cliché to say, but children and youth are so open,” Andrade said.

Meanwhile, in Calgary, The Road Church has been steadily making their own efforts toward reconciliation, in part by engaging in CAMC’s preaching challenge based on the question “What do the biblical calls to hospitality and reconciled relationships mean for your church’s relationships with local Indigenous peoples?” The congregation’s response included inviting an Indigenous elder, Cheryle Chagnon Greyeyes, to speak at their service.

And in Winnipeg, Good News Fellowship ran an eight-week small group based on the Truth and Reconciliation Report. The group was able to share their learnings with the rest of the congregation during June’s Aboriginal Sunday service.

Edgington sees Aboriginal ministry as a key way to connect churches and neighboring communities. He sums up the importance of all these reconciliation efforts recognizing the large justice need as well: “As deacons, and as Christians, we need to be looking at the systems we live in, how [they] affect people, and how [they] affect those that are hurting the most. And too often, it’s Indigenous people within our communities who are suffering.”

—Krista dela Rosa

Portrait Project Connects Generations Through Faith and Art

Sharing art and faith created special bonds between students from South Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Mich., and residents from a local senior living center earlier this year. A class assignment resulted in dozens of hand-drawn portraits as well as new intergenerational relationships that enriched both seniors and students.

In April, 70 drawing and painting students along with 20 graphic arts students met with residents at Byron Center Manor, an independent and assisted living facility not far from the school. Each student interviewed a resident, took photos, and did preliminary sketches for the pencil and charcoal portraits he or she would work on for the next several weeks. In May, an art reception brought the artists and their subjects together again for a celebration.

Art teacher Roberta Van Haitsma, a member of Discovery Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, along with her friend Julie Bouma, operations manager at Byron Center Manor, came up with the idea.

"It's good for generations to work together," said Bouma of the project. She also liked that the residents and their families would have a keepsake afterward.

In class, Van Haitsma and her students talked about putting their faith and love into action and connecting to people through art.

"It's been really cool to bond with [seniors] and learn about how it was when they were a kid," said Justin

Sytsma, student artist and a member of Friendship CRC in Byron Center.

Wuendy Diaz Diaz, another student artist, said, "At times I was scared and frustrated, because drawing people is really hard." When she arrived at the May reception, Diaz Diaz learned the man whose portrait she drew was not going to live much longer.

Diaz Diaz gave her new friend and his family the gift of the original portrait she drew. "They loved it so much and he wanted me to keep it, but I wanted to remember my time with him and that big smile on his face when he saw the drawing. His reaction was priceless, and I will forever remember him," she said.

—Susan Vanden Berg



An art student visits with his new friend and profile subject at Byron Center Manor.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Bert T. Den Herder
1923-2018

Bert Den Herder lived a good and godly life. He died on June 30 at the age of 94.

After graduating from Calvin Seminary in 1955, Den Herder served the following Christian Reformed churches in Canada: Bethel, Lacombe, Alta.; Nelson Avenue Community, Burnaby, B.C.; Agassiz, B.C.; and Cornerstone, Chilliwack, B.C. Returning to the U.S., he pastored Luverne (Minn.) CRC and Kanawha (Iowa) CRC. After retirement in 1989, he continued to remain active in local church life.

Den Herder enjoyed reading, playing Scrabble, gardening, and canning its produce together with his wife. He didn't like small talk but enjoyed engaging people in theological conversation.

During his last three years residing in a nursing home in Edgerton, Minn., Den Herder was active in men's Bible study, occasionally leading it as well as worship services. Providing pastoral care to families whose loved ones were sick or dying made his time there meaningful for him.

Den Herder was predeceased by his wife, Clara, in 2014, and by a great-granddaughter and a son-in-law. He is survived by his six children and spouses, 17 grandchildren, and 36 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Do Synods Remember? A Look at Ministry Shares

When annual synods take important actions, do future synods remember those decisions and the context for them? (Synod is the annual general assembly of the Christian Reformed Church.)

Here is one such decision and what the result was.

Synod 2016 instructed the Board of Trustees (now the Council of Delegates) to evaluate and prioritize all existing denominational programs and ministries with the goal of “reducing the institutional footprint [of the denomination].” One of the reasons for the decision, noted in the grounds, is to allow churches and classes to better support their local ministries. The results of the efforts were to be reported to Synod 2018. (See *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 858.)

Synod 2016 was responding to both a request from Classis Iakota (a regional group of churches) and a report from a task force commissioned by the Board of Trustees (BOT) to look at the ministry shares system.

Iakota was concerned about the amount of money that flows from local churches to the denominational ministries and administration. It suggested that some of that money would be better left with the congregations to invest in local ministry.

For example, in 2016 each congregation was asked to pay an assessment (called “ministry shares”) of \$339.48 for every member over the



Director of Finance and Operations John Bolt discusses ministry shares at Synod 2016.

age of 18. A congregation of 100 members would pay \$33,948.

Many churches have simply reduced the amount they pay for ministry shares in order to expand local ministry. Rather than accepting that, Classis Iakota’s request to synod was to radically overhaul the ministry shares system itself and reduce the amount flowing from churches to the denomination.

Alternatively, the task force report also studied the system, not with an eye to reducing the overall budget but to making ministry shares mandatory on each classis. With everyone participating, ministry shares could be reduced from \$339 to \$239 and still raise the same amount of money as before.

Much of the impetus for the Iakota overture came from Kory Plockmeyer, then pastor of Covenant CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa. At the



Rob Buikema at Synod 2016: “The number keeps going up.”

time, Covenant was discussing how both to pay for new congregational ministries and to cover its share of classical and denominational ministry shares.

Under the Iakota proposal, by 2021 some denominational agencies would no longer receive ministry shares and others would receive sharply reduced amounts. The total denominational budget would be cut in half. With radically reduced ministry shares, every church would be expected to participate. Ministry shares per person would go from \$339 to just under \$70. That 100-member congregation would pay \$7,000 rather than nearly \$34,000.

In response to the two proposals, delegates to Synod 2016 came up with their own plan, endorsing the task force report and also giving the board and denominational leadership a directive that included the goal of “reducing the institutional footprint.”



William Delleman at Synod 2016: “The goal is to reduce ‘ministry creep.’”

Compared to the Iakota proposal to radically reduce ministry shares, “reducing the denominational footprint,” is not specific. In an interview with *The Banner*, Steven Timmermans, executive director of the CRC, called it “ill-defined.”

Even so, some people—including Plockmeyer—interpreted it to mean that the BOT would develop plans to reduce the overall denominational budget substantially to leave more money in local churches for its ministries, as mentioned in the grounds for the decision. Timmermans and the board interpreted it differently, as a call to economize where possible within the bounds of the current system.

Timmermans pointed to actions taken since 2016 to reduce the denominational footprint. He mentioned selling the building of Back to God Ministries International in Palos Heights, Ill., reducing

Christian Ministry Provides More Than Shelter in Chicago

overall denomination staff by the equivalent of 15 full-time positions, and eliminating some programs such as Sustaining Congregational Excellence and World Literature Ministries.

He pointed out that the ministry shares assessment (increased to \$346.48) for the next fiscal year is not actually what churches pay, since many underpay the assessments. Plockmeyer, however, would argue that it is better to radically change the system than assume some churches won't pay their share.

When Synod 2018 received the report on the results of the 2016 instructions, there was no discussion. Delegates encouraged the denominational staff to continue to do what they have already been doing, economizing by "combining program functions and infrastructure," exploring ways to save physical plant costs, and implementing a "robust evaluation strategy."

That missed the point of the 2016 decision to reduce the denominational footprint, according to Plockmeyer. "There needs to be a conversation about how to do our mission as the church." That conversation would have included the Lakota desire to rebalance the relationship between the denomination and congregations.

That larger conversation did not happen—not at Synod 2016 nor at Synod 2018. When delegates, many of whom were first-timers, decided that continuing to do what the staff had already been doing was fulfillment of Synod 2016's instruction "to reduce the denominational footprint," did they realize that "prioritization and evaluation" was meant to be in service of that goal? Plockmeyer thinks not.

In response to the question with which we began, Plockmeyer said, "Synods tend to forget."

—Clayton Libolt



Cadets and other programs are offered to the children and their mothers who access transitional housing.

Roseland Christian Ministries in Chicago, Ill., offers transitional housing to mothers and their children. But its integrated approach allows them to be cared for with more than just a roof over their heads.

"We have given families a warm and peaceful place to sleep at night, a faith community to support and encourage them, and programs for their kids to participate in," said Kisha Pleasant, Roseland's ministry director. "It also means success for the community—seeing women get off the streets is encouraging."

Roseland Christian Ministries is part of the fabric of Chicago's South Side, too often featured in the news because of gun violence. The shelter has been in high demand since it opened 18 months ago. On the first day, staff received 110 calls inquiring after the shelter's 13 rooms. In May, the end of its first operational year, more than 23 mothers and 65 children had experienced the love of Christ through the shelter.

Roseland previously offered housing for women only, so it was continually having to turn down women with children. The new center, funded by private donors, provides shelter for women and their children (from infant to age 13) for up to 12 months.

"Roseland Christian Ministries has been great," said Danielle Brown, a mom with two sons who was served by the ministry. "I am so grateful. I've stayed at other shelters, and RCM has shown us love. My sons love the Cadets [boys' club] program, and when we move out, we will come back so the boys can stay part of the programs."

Roseland Christian Reformed Church (Chicago, Ill.) is the worshipping body of Roseland Christian Ministries.

"It keeps me hopeful to know that on this corner [109th and Michigan] there is a Christian community that has been here for 41 years for [people who are] hungry, homeless, harassed, and helpless," said pastor Joe Huizenga. "I'm grateful that I get to connect and serve and use my gifts here."

—Melissa Holtrop

IN MEMORIAM



*Chaplain Lt. Col.
Ralph Waldon Bronkema*
1930-2018

A compassionate, empathetic, and gentle man, Ralph Bronkema, also known as Don to his family, died on July 30.

Bronkema began ministry in 1954 with two church plants in Michigan and Florida. He then joined the U.S. Air Force in 1966, serving for 20 years as chaplain at bases across the U.S., Germany, and Vietnam. He reached the rank of lieutenant colonel before his honorable discharge. A week later he became assistant pastor at Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Indialantic, Fla. He then pastored Shalom CRC in Sioux Falls, S.D., until retiring in 1995. In 2003 he became pastor of visitation at Eastminster until his "final" retirement in 2017.

One of Bronkema's hobbies was restoring a 1973 Cadillac El Dorado convertible. He and his wife, Louise, were project managers on four Christian Reformed World Relief Committee projects. After she suffered a devastating stroke, Bronkema cared for Louise for seven years. Following her death in 2010, he married Annette Cooke.

He is survived by his wife, Annette; four children and spouses; nine grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. Six Cooke stepchildren will also miss his gentle spirit.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Trinity Western University's Change on Mandatory Covenant Emphasizes Welcome

"We welcome, and have for decades, individuals who wish to study in a Christian environment," said Bob Kuhn, president of Trinity Western University (TWU), in Langley, B.C. "We desired to clarify that point to people who may have misunderstood, especially over the number of years when there was debate of whether we were welcoming of students," Kuhn explained, after the school announced in August its decision to make its community covenant non-mandatory.

The covenant, that until this new school term students had to sign in order to attend TWU, was the center of a case taken to the Supreme Court of Canada on TWU's proposed law school. A June 15 ruling upheld the position of two Canadian law societies that the covenant was discriminatory against LGBTQ persons. (See "Moving Forward after Canadian Supreme Court's Law School Ruling," Sept. 2018.)

On August 9, Trinity Western's Board of Governors passed a motion making the community covenant non-mandatory "with respect to admission of students to, or continuation of students at, the University." While the recent court ruling was a factor in the decision, it was not the only factor, as the school said the covenant has been the subject of considerable discussion for many years. TWU felt that



Trinity Western University campus.

maintaining the status quo was no longer the best way to fulfill the university's mission and ministry.

Other Christian universities in Canada also operate without a mandatory contract. At The King's University, in Edmonton, Alta., faculty and staff sign a faith statement but they do not have a student behavioral covenant.

"I have served in Christian higher education for over 20 years. If there is something I have learned, it is that legislating behavior only gets you so far. The gospel is, first and foremost, an invitation," said Melanie Humphreys, president at The King's University.

At Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont., students are also not required to sign a mandatory covenant. But in the admissions process, Redeemer's undergraduate students do acknowledge that, during their time at Redeemer, they are expected to abide by the

school's statement of life and conduct. This statement is also used by all staff and faculty at Redeemer.

Both The King's University and Redeemer University College are affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church.

While TWU will no longer require students to sign its covenant, the document itself remains unchanged and will continue to articulate the values that shape the community. "We will remain a Biblically-based, mission-focused, academically excellent University, fully committed to our foundational evangelical Christian principles," the university's statement said.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

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The Journey of Inclusion

by Chris Meehan

One Sunday morning Beth Fellerger finished her sermon by asking everyone in the former restaurant—now a church—to stand and hold hands.

Fellerger is the pastor at Destination Church in St. Thomas, Ont., a congregation that's intentional about including all people in its community regardless of their struggles or perceived abilities.

Fellerger had been preaching from Matthew 12:46-50. In this passage, Jesus is teaching people inside a house when a man tells him his mother and brothers are outside wanting to see him.

Pointing to his disciples, Jesus says, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

As people of God, Fellerger said, the people worshiping at Destination had all joined a new family whose significance goes beyond blood relationships.

As a family, she added, our job is to do the will of the Father: "We are to take stock of whatever gifts we have and ask if we are using them to build the body together. We are to pray with one another, to lift one another up."

Destination Church is one of several congregations across the Christian Reformed Church that live out this all-inclusive sense of family. Such inclusion is a crucial part of Christ's message, said Mark Stephenson, co-director of Disability Concerns, a joint ministry of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America.

"Jesus' first recorded sermon proclaimed that God's kingdom was at hand. Then he spent the rest of his public ministry on earth bringing in the kingdom," Stephenson said. "Our calling as disability advocates is to carry on Jesus' work so that all people—especially people with disabilities—will be welcomed into the body of Christ and encouraged to use their gifts in ministry."

Destination Church strives to do just that. St. Thomas, a community of about 38,000 people, was hard-hit during the 2008 recession, when two automobile plants in town closed. The city also has a significant number of people connected to the provincial mental health system. A large psychiatric hospital was located in the community for many years. That has now closed, but a forensic care facility has been opened.

"Generations of people came from all over Ontario to the [psychiatric] hospital," Fellerger said. "When

they were released, their doctors and various programs were here, and they never went home."

When the government closed the hospital, some patients ended up homeless; others lived in group homes. Similarly, many released from the forensic hospital stay in town.

Not everyone who attends Destination lives with a disability, but everyone is helped in their walk of faith.

"We have a real mixture of people who come here," Fellerger said. "By being where we are, we have an opportunity to engage with them. We see that God is really working here."

The people who come to Destination stand, hold hands, and worship as God's family on Sunday mornings. They use the church as a drop-in center, sitting at tables and sipping coffee during the week. They stop by on Thursday nights for a "Stone Soup" dinner—a meal for which people contribute ingredients for the soup. People also work in the community garden, serve as greeters, and attend leadership training classes.

Who are these people, and how do they serve?

Here are a few:

Both of Sam's* parents died during a six-week period in 2016. When Sam started attending Destination, he seemed passive, perhaps because he has an intellectual disability and had never been welcomed to serve at churches he'd previously attended.

Then, Fellerger said, "Destination started asking him to do simple things, like getting a coffee for someone else."

As he handled these responsibilities, the church asked him to do more. "Sam is part of the hospitality team and volunteers daily. He reads Scripture in services, helps in Sunday school, and does drama with the drama team," said Fellerger.

Sam's story shows how Destination seeks to enfold people into its fellowship.

When someone comes to Destination, Fellerger said, the church makes no prejudgments about what a person can or cannot do. They do not look first at a person's disabilities, but instead focus on how that person is gifted.

"We work to discover where people's gifts are, and we have a conversation with them about what they believe their gifts are and give them the opportunity to try," Fellerger said.

Rebecca Anderson connected with Destination about seven years ago, not long after the church formed with the support of Resonate Global Mission. She learned of Destination through a friend and showed up.

"I instantly felt comfortable," Anderson recalls. One memory especially stuck with her. "When I first attended, my children were young and were not always willing to sit quietly. I remember one of the members

smiled at me and my children and told me to take a breath—they are children—and I did, and relaxed, and was really able to take in the service.” Anderson said Destination has helped her grow as a Christian.

“One of the most important things that Destination has helped me with,” she adds, “is being more comfortable praying with others. I always worried that I would not say the right thing or not sound as lyrical as others, but by allowing myself to be vulnerable to others I have learned I am not the only one who has this fear. Now I am happy to say what is in my heart because I know the words will come. A church is not a building. We are the church.”

Eva Kuhn struggles with depression. She was sitting at a table in the drop-in center one afternoon with her young adult son. They come often just to be together and to talk with others.

Before joining Destination, Kuhn had tried other denominations, including a Catholic and a Baptist church. “But from the first day I came in here,” she said, “I fell in love and thought this is where I have needed to be all of my life.”

Fellinger’s smile and upbeat personality were “like a ray of sunshine,” Kuhn says. “Something clicked, and so I kept coming here. . . . To help out, I hand out bulletins on Sunday morning. I help in the kitchen and clean up.”

Kuhn’s faith in God has been renewed at Destination. “I feel like I’ve grown. I used to be afraid just going down the street, and now I don’t feel afraid anymore,” she said.

After spending only a few months at Destination, David and Cindy Feddema began to see its resemblance to the early Christian churches described in Acts—churches that shared their lives and worldly goods and followed the leading of the Spirit.

At the heart of Destination, said David Feddema, who has attended since 2013, is the desire be a community that sees the face of Christ in everyone. They are a family with room for anyone seeking faith and the love of others.

“As a church, we actively share the good news of the gospel with those willing to listen,” he said. “We welcome everyone to come as they are and try to add value to each person’s life.”

Feddema is grateful to see how the love they share in their church family has been moving out and touching the wider community.

“My prayer is that we are having an impact on the community of St. Thomas,” he said. “We have tried to build relationships between our church and numerous social agencies within the city. I think it’s just the beginning, and these connections will expand beyond our imagination.”

**Name changed to protect privacy.*

Making Progress in Disability Concerns

More than 40 years ago, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in North America began to seriously consider how it could best minister with people with disabilities.

“Seminal conversations at that time resulted in the birth of both Disability Concerns and Friendship Ministries,” said Mark Stephenson, co-director of Disability Concerns.

The CRC created the original Friendship curriculum to support faith formation and congregational inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Today Friendship is a stand-alone ministry serving churches and organizations around the world.

CRC and Reformed Church in America Disability Concerns ministries work together to help congregations become places where everybody belongs and everybody serves.

Since 1997, CRC Disability Concerns has surveyed Christian Reformed congregations about the accessibility of their buildings, their communication, and their ministries.

“These surveys show clear progress in accessibility,” Stephenson said.

Fifteen years ago, for example, fewer than half of CRC facilities had accessible main entrances, restrooms, classrooms, fellowship areas, and worship spaces. Now, nearly 90 percent of churches have made these spaces accessible.

“Pulpit areas remain the least accessible parts of buildings, with only about one-third of churches having accessibility in that area,” Stephenson said.

But more than one-third of congregations now have a disability policy, he added, and accessible communications (barrier-free print and sound) have also shown modest improvement over the years.

“My sense is that many more congregations are thinking about accessibility issues—and not just building accessibility—than when I started this work 12 years ago,” said Stephenson.

At the same time, he also notes a continuing need for education, advocacy, and action for including those with disabilities in congregational life.

He gives the example of professions of faith. “Surprisingly, we have seen a significant decline in the number of reported professions of faith of people who have disabilities, from a high of 310 in 2006 to none in 2015,” he said. “We’ve made good progress, but we still have a long ways to go.” 

Chris Meehan, CRC Communications

All Generations Worshiping Together

WHAT SORTS OF WORSHIP practices clearly proclaim that all ages are welcome as the community gathers for worship?

The fourth grade Sunday School class at Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ont., came up with an unusual answer to this question while planning its Sunday school graduation service.

"We loved the banners that our church makes for worship," explained graduate Hannah Whetstone, "and we came up with the idea of having everyone in the church place a painted handprint on long sheets of paper as they were filing up to the communion stations. Our Sunday school teachers really encouraged us to plan our graduation in a way that showed how we all belong together as a church."

The next Sunday those long sheets were hanging at the front of the sanctuary with several hundred handprints of all sizes on display as a liturgical symbol of all ages worshipping together. "We thought it was really cool that everybody was able to find their own handprint on the banners," concluded Hannah.

These banners were just the latest in a series of actions Meadowlands Fellowship has taken to show that intergenerational worship is of high value to them.

Last year, for example, Pastor Everett VanderHorst preached a series on the Old Testament. The congregation was invited to produce artwork for each Sunday. During the series, the art was placed next to the pulpit and featured on the bulletin cover

and on PowerPoint slides. One week the artist was a graphic designer; the next, an 8-year-old. After the series, all 30 works were displayed gallery-style throughout the building.

Similarly, the eight-person worship team of Meadowlands Fellowship includes four teenagers who have gradually been apprenticed toward musical excellence. Worship leader Marja Fledderus actively recruits middle school students and is intentional about youth leadership development. She conducts rehearsals with patient, sturdy mentoring combined with playful interactions to help younger members grow.

Faith storytelling is incorporated into worship and congregational life in a variety of ways. The congregation recognizes that one of the deepest ways to honor bridges across generations is to provide glimpses of how the Lord is working in people's lives.

Faith Formation Ministries is eager to help churches who want to follow Meadowlands Fellowship's example of strengthening intergenerational worship and outreach. Many resources are available online at crcna.org/FaithFormation. This includes online toolkits on Faith Storytelling, The Building Blocks of Faith, Welcoming Children to the Table, and Children's Ministry.

Syd Hielema, Faith Formation Ministries



Handprints from all members of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC were displayed on banners at the front of the sanctuary.

The View from Here

Living a Life of Unity

THOSE WHO ATTENDED the Inspire 2017 ministry conference were privileged to view a video showing multiple speakers reciting the Apostles' Creed. With each speaker voicing only a phrase, the compiled result provided an amazing testimony made all the more significant because the speakers were children, teens, and adults living with disabilities.

The video was produced by Faith Church, a Reformed Church in America (RCA) multisite church anchored in Dyer, Ind. If you haven't seen the video, I urge you to watch it at vimeo.com/122144805.

This video is incredibly effective. It provides us a picture of the body of Christ voicing its faith in unity. Moreover, it includes people living with disabilities—members of the body of Christ who are often overlooked or forgotten.

Reformed Christians are not Sunday-only Christians. We are the church when we gather for worship, but we are also the church when we participate in our congregations' various ministries and when we carry out our responsibilities every day of the week.

As I think about enfolding people with disabilities into our churches, I am reminded that this too is a 24/7 task. So I'd like to share some of my perspective—one that's been shaped by my son Paul, a delightful 32-year-old man who happens to have Down Syndrome.

As a family, we've been blessed by the body of Christ, whether coalesced from members of our congregation or from our circle of friends. When my wife, Barb, and I both were working outside of the home, we were grateful for those who stepped up to give Paul

Life is messy
for many, many
reasons—including
when disability is part
of the picture.

transportation to work or to social activities. It's like the logistics required of soccer parents, only it's not just for a season. It's every day, year after year, and the body of Christ serves faithfully.

Paul has been a member of three Christian Reformed churches in his life. This page is too short to share all the stories of how these congregations have embraced Paul's membership in Christ's body, but they include Paul pinch hitting for collecting offerings at Loop CRC, his one-to-one catechism instruction at Neland CRC, and being friend of all at First CRC.

The common thread is important. Each congregation was intentional about seeking to use the gifts of all its members and making room for these gifts to be expressed.

As I read some of the things posted on Facebook by parents of children with various disabilities, I'm struck that social media gives us opportunities beyond the typical "share and care" methods of our congregations.

We all seek to enter church on Sunday mornings looking as if we are (mostly) succeeding at parenting. Clothes are clean, behavior is appropriate, and we take our spots in the pew. But if we're honest, life is not as easy as we seek to portray in our social media profiles or in the pews. Life is messy for many,

many reasons—including when disability is part of the picture.

Parents of people living with disabilities might let you glimpse this messy reality through their social media posts. When they do, you can respond. If you aren't on social media, or if they don't share in that way, you can still initiate connection with others in a way that characterizes the body of Christ.

Find a time to have coffee together. Provide a way to allow those who are weary a chance to be renewed. Advocate for greater inclusion at church by discovering new ways to share each other's gifts. The list goes on and on.

That which we confess is appropriately specific: We "believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen." Let's live what we believe for all!



Steven Timmermans is the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

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

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

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

Not Useless: Light in Darkness

LIFE IS OFTEN DIFFICULT for people in China who are blind, Wang Ying wrote in an online essay competition hosted by the Chinese ministry of Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI).

"People usually think that those who are born blind like me would be content," Ying wrote. "Since I have never seen light, the darkness is no big deal. But oh, how I long for brightness!"

For Ying, work was difficult and conditions poor. But even worse than her physical exhaustion was feeling as if she was separated from the rest of society.

"The darkness in front of my eyes divided me from others. I couldn't get past that divide, and it made me unbearably miserable," Ying said. "The darkness of my soul engulfed me even more, doubling my desperation so that I tried to commit suicide three times."

But then a friend—also blind—invited Ying to church, where Ying experienced something incredible.

"When the church welcomed new people, a warm applause, melodious singing, and beautiful flowers surrounded me tightly like a flame, and I was moved to tears before God," Ying said. "I was like an abandoned child. Many years ago my father left, but now I have found my Father in heaven."

Encouraged in her faith, Ying eventually opened her own massage shop to bring healing to her clients and to share the gospel. Because of your support for BTGMI through ministry shares and offerings, she has also written her story for others to read.

The original version of her story appears with 39 other powerful testimonies from Chinese believers in the recently published book *The Reason for You* 《漠何是我》, which BTGMI is distributing among Chinese young people studying throughout North America.

"In the past, people often told me that blind people are damaged and useless," noted Ying. "In the Lord, I am not damaged because I am the perfect work of the heavenly Father.



Wang Ying found God's light in the darkness of her soul.

In the Lord, I am not useless because my life is a witness to God in order to glorify him until the day that I see him."

Find out more at backtogod.net/ministries/chinese.

—Heather Haveman, BTGMI Chinese ministry

New Christian High School Opens in Rehoboth, New Mexico



Rehoboth Christian School

FUNDED ENTIRELY BY DONATIONS from alumni, families, churches, donors, and foundations, a new Rehoboth Christian High School has opened in Rehoboth, N.M.

The facility for grades 9-12 cost more than \$9 million and will include nine new classrooms, renovations to two existing classrooms, space for staff, an art classroom, two science labs, a computer lab, and a lounge space for students.

"This school has been the building block of my faith," said Donovan Carlile, who graduated more than 30 years ago and is today the school's maintenance supervisor. "The people at the school have put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into me and many others.

"God created this school and brought the people here for a purpose," he continued. "I've always been open-minded and open-hearted about what I was doing. Rehoboth taught me a lot, and now I'm giving back."

The new school is about 30,000 square feet and accommodates up to 225 students.

"We have gotten tremendous gifts out of the blue," said Bob Ippel, executive director of Rehoboth Christian School. "God is so good. We are reminded that this new building would not have been built without the work of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God."

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

Campus Ministry Sparks Lifelong Leadership

"INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES are often included somewhere—and then they're left behind," said Peter Gordon, a campus minister at Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC). "I'm always trying to propel the students forward. What next?"

Hailey was a GRCC freshman when she first stumbled upon the table Gordon set up for Jabez Ministries, a Christian Reformed campus ministry supported by Resonate Global Mission that primarily serves students with disabilities.

Hailey had found faith in Christ as a teenager, but she came from a family of mostly nonbelievers and did not have a strong Christian community to walk alongside her as she navigated the uncertainty of life as a young adult.

In her first year of college, she was not sure what gifts God had given her or where God was calling her. And college was even more challenging for Hailey because she is visually impaired and lives with Asperger's syndrome.

But life changed for her when she learned about Jabez Ministries. She asked Gordon when and how she could get involved, and he said she could come to the next meeting.

"We immediately dove into Scripture as we ate our lunch, and I felt that this group was where I belonged,"



Hailey (left) working the campus ministries table on GRCC's Club Day.

Growing Faith and Coffee

Hailey said. “So I stuck with it, and I love how far we’ve come individually and as a group.”

Jabez Ministries does not focus on the barriers of disabilities. Gordon encourages students to explore their gifts and look for opportunities to grow.

Sometimes growth is predictable and linear, Gordon said, but Hailey’s growth has been more like fireworks.

“[Her spirit] is infectious,” Gordon said. “She’s got a smile that just warms the entire room. She’s made so many friends on campus; they’ll come right over. Hailey has a gift of drawing other students into conversations that they wouldn’t otherwise [participate in].”

This year Hailey is serving alongside Gordon as an intern for Jabez Ministries. She is one of 12 students across North America benefiting from intensive Reformed leadership training through Resonate’s Emerging Leader program for campus ministries.

Helping students like Hailey explore their gifts, find their callings, develop as leaders, and grow as disciples of Christ is why Resonate supports CRC campus ministries such as Jabez Ministries.

“Sanctification in Christ is a lifelong process and never an overnight thing,” said Hailey. “We grow every single day. I praise God for providing such a wonderful group of people in my life, especially at a part of my life where I’m still trying to find my footing as a young adult.”

—Cassie Westrate,
Resonate Global Mission

MODESTA LUCAS BRAVO grew up around coffee plants. Her parents harvested coffee as plantation workers in rural Guatemala.

Growing coffee was hard work, and Bravo’s parents didn’t have enough income to send her to school.

Eventually, Bravo moved to El Tineco, a community of approximately 400 people in southeast Guatemala. Here most families make a living through agriculture. El Tineco is far away from any large cities, so both economic resources and opportunities for education are limited.

Bravo started a family in El Tineco and followed in her parents’ footsteps by farming coffee.

Even in those challenging times, her Christian faith remained strong. When she describes her family’s economic struggles, she also points out that they “believe in the existence of God.”

Bravo’s powerful faith in God drove her to change her life for the better by exploring her God-given potential in new ways. “I’m so thankful for God’s purposes,” she said, “because he sent us help in our time of need.”

That help came in the form of trainings that Bravo could attend thanks to a partnership with World Renew and a program called *Vid y Pámpanos* (Vine and Branches).

Vid y Pámpanos is the diaconal ministry of the Reformed Confessional Presbytery in the Quetzaltenango region.

World Renew is helping *Vid y Pámpanos* with agricultural work in four of the regions’ poorest rural communities.



In her coffee field, Modesta Lucas Bravo has put into practice the skills she learned in agricultural training.

The ministry also provides preventive health and leadership development. Through these trainings, Bravo learned about farming techniques and the best practices for growing coffee. She began to put into practice the skills she was learning, taking better care of the soil on her land and diversifying crops.

Bravo has added other crops including cacao, plantains, bananas, and pataxte to her plot of land. She has also cultivated a garden to improve her family’s nutrition.

Bravo said she has seen significant changes in how she farms, and those changes carry over to how she lives. She now has the drive to improve the living conditions of her family.

Her faithfulness has continued to grow alongside her coffee.

“[Now] I have a hope that God will always be with us and will give us his blessing,” she said.

—Amy Everett,
World Renew

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We're here to serve.



**Christian
Reformed
Church**

A-maize-ing Corn

WHAT IS A VEGETABLE, a grain, and a fruit all at the same time? Corn! Another word for corn is maize. In the fall, some farmers use their corn fields to create fun mazes for families to explore. A-maize-ing!

Where Did Corn Come From?

Corn was first planted and harvested in Mexico and in Central America thousands of years ago. Native Americans taught English settlers how to grow corn in North America. Maize is a Native word meaning "sacred mother" or "giver of life."

Parts of a Corn Plant

If you've seen fields of cornstalks waving in the summer breeze, you probably won't be surprised to learn that corn is part of the grass family. The ears of corn, called cobs, grow on long stalks. Inside each ear of corn are hundreds of seeds called kernels. Did you know that most corn stalks can grow up to 15 feet tall?

Each corn stalk grows from a single kernel that is planted in the ground and grows into grass-like sprouts. Then a thick stalk with lots of leaves forms. At the top of the stalk is the tassel. This is the part of the corn plant that contains the pollen. The wind blows the pollen to other corn plants.

What Is Corn Used For?

Corn is used for food. Think about all the times you enjoyed sweet, juicy corn on the cob for dinner last summer or shared a tub of buttered popcorn while watching your favorite movie. People also use corn to make cereal, cornbread, and lots of other delicious foods.

Corn is used as fuel for cars. Ethanol is a special fuel made from corn that can power some kinds of cars.

Corn is used in making many other non-food items too, including fire-works, glue, paint, dyes, laundry detergent, soap, aspirin, paint, shoe polish, ink, and cosmetics.

Corn is used to make food containers, packages, and dishes. Unlike regular plastic containers and spoons, corn-based products are biodegradable.



Did You Know?

- » Corn is grown on every continent of the world except Antarctica.
- » Some ears of corn have more than 800 kernels.
- » A corn cob will always have an even number of rows of kernels.
- » Corn comes in lots of different colors. Yellow is the most most common color, but it also comes in black, dark blue, purple, green, red, and white.
- » One bushel of corn can sweeten 400 cans of soda.
- » Corn grows its male and female flowers on the same plant. The male flower of a corn plant is called the tassel, while the ear with its corn silk is the female flower. 



Christin Baker is a stay-at-home mom and writer.



Photo by Kaitlyn Baker / Unsplash

Prayers of the Infertile: Longing, Hope, and Solidarity

Cory B. Willson

For nearly two years now, my wife and I have been praying for God to give us a child. Every month we go through the repeated cycle of hope, then fear and disappointment. Two years of numerous medical appointments and tests; hope deferred 24 times. The question we dread facing is this: At what point do we give up this hope—and grieve the loss of our hope—for a biological child? At times it seems easier to stop hoping than to live with the heartache of repeated disappointment. But it's hard to know how to mourn when you don't have definitive answers.

Some months are more painful than others. With every doctor appointment, blood test, cycle chart, and medical procedure we expose ourselves to risk—each step an act of hope creating further vulnerability to disappointment.

One dark morning on our drive to work, my wife said, “Cory, I’m over a week late. That is very unusual for me.” I held my breath, afraid to speak for fear of jinxing anything—superstition comes naturally in moments of desperation and helplessness. We drove on in silence.

My hopes proved to be short-lived. When she pulled up to my workplace at the end of the day, I could read on her face the news I dreaded.

Years ago, Jean Vanier, the founder of the L’Arche communities for people with intellectual disabilities, visited a psychiatric hospital filled with orphans. Once inside, he was confronted by the eerie silence of hundreds of children lying neglected on their cots. There was no crying or commotion. “When they realize that nobody cares, that nobody will answer them,” wrote Vanier in *Becoming Human* (Paulist Press, 1998), “children no longer cry. It takes too much energy. We cry out only when there is hope that someone will hear us.”

Dare We Speak of Hope?

How does our Christian faith enable us to carry on when hope seems lost? How do we encourage one another in the context of Christian community? My answer is simple: We dare not speak of hope if we do not practice solidarity and lament.

The problem in many North American churches is that we largely speak in words of pithy optimism with theology about as deep as a Hallmark sympathy

card. We cannot stomach the fragility of the hope we encounter in the face of people’s ongoing suffering, preferring to fortify ourselves against their pain with theological platitudes that keep us at arms’ length. Something about a suffering person unsettles the “safe” world of would-be comforters.

Consider a sampling of responses I have heard from fellow Christians: “At least your wife is young; you still have time.” “Have you looked into adoption?” Or “My wife and I struggled for a few months, but then we gave it over to God and we got pregnant.” Responses like these reveal an unwillingness to sit in ashes with us. This incapacity for solidarity is painfully sad and incredibly isolating for those suffering. Is it any wonder more people don’t speak up about infertility in our churches?

Someone will inevitably ask, “Aren’t you forgetting about the gospel and its offer of hope?” Eschatologically, our hope is secure—the risen Christ will return; sin, Satan, and death will be no more (Rev. 20:7-21:4). But hope—biblical hope—should lead us to be more attentive to present suffering, not less. Hope is not an opiate; rather, it keeps us crying out to God. Hope should lead us to

groan laments because things aren't the way they're supposed to be (Rom. 8:18-27), such as the continuing mutilation of black bodies, the usury of Latino labor without providing legalized status, and, yes, even the silent suffering of infertility.

Hope is fragile, sometimes even dangerous. And yet we cannot live long without hope.

So how are we to speak of hope when there seems to be no clear path forward, when God is silent? Where can we find strength to hope when the future is uncertain and we have no promise that our desires will be fulfilled in this life? I have found guidance in the stories of two people who suffered immensely and lived in an extended state of deferred hope.

Hope Deferred and Communal Solidarity

Hope in God is a communal endeavor, not a solitary one. Harriet Jacobs was an African American slave whose material conditions gave her no reason to hope. And no one could have any reason to speak optimistic words of hope over her dark situation. However, a community of people came around her to enact hope throughout her journey.

Jacobs was barely an adolescent when her "Christian" slave master tried for several years to force her into a sexual relationship. Before her master's perverse plans could develop further, Jacobs chose to give herself to a white lawyer in town. In her memoir, she said it seemed less degrading to bear children with an unmarried man who treated her kindly than to submit to the control of her master's adulterous compulsions (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*).

But Jacobs' troubles were not over. As her children grew, her master used them as pawns to coerce her to submit to his will. Forced to act, Harriet feigned an escape to the North and hid in the attic of her grandmother's home. Nearly seven years of her life

Hope should
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were spent lying in that narrow crawl space.

What kept Jacobs' hope alive during those years is a powerful description of sacrificial community. Countless friends and family risked prison and death to transfer her between hiding places and to arrange her passage North. Some came under cover of night to bring her news of danger or updates about her children. Most did not leave before mingling their tears with hers. Tender moments of affection from these visitors brought compassion amid her lonely agony. After Jacobs learned that her children had been thrown in jail, her friend Betty slept beside her as she wept through the night.

What kept Jacobs' hope alive? Not a naive optimism that material conditions will inevitably improve over time. As we look back from two centuries later, we know that freedom from slavery did not give way to equality, but rather to lynchings, Jim Crow, and segregation. Harriet's hope instead came from the costly solidarity within the African American community as together they took steps toward life and freedom in the face of injustice and despair.

Breaking the Silence: Lament as a Form of Hope

Every year during Lent I read Elie Wiesel's book *Night* to help me

inhabit Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. This year I read it looking for hope that would keep me struggling on the path of life and away from the deadening of silence Vanier warned about.

Night is an extended autobiographical treatment on the fragility of hope amid the horrors of genocide. It tells of Wiesel's experience of the Holocaust and the murder of his parents and siblings in Nazi concentration camps. Early on, Wiesel gives repeated examples of Jews who held out false hope that "things will get better" or that "circumstances are not as bad as they seem." Such optimism blinded them to the real intent of the Nazis. "The Germans were already in the town, the Fascists were already in power, the verdict had already been pronounced," wrote Wiesel, "yet the Jews of Sighet continued to smile." In contrast to false optimism, Wiesel describes the quick demise of those who lost hope for someone or something in life beyond the concentration camp. Optimism and despair ultimately led to the same end.

A turning point in Wiesel's struggle with faith comes after he witnesses the execution of a young boy alongside two adults. Horrified, the prisoners watched the hanging and were then made to march past the bodies. The hanged adults died immediately, but because the child was so light, he straddled life and death for more than half an hour. He was still living when Wiesel passed by.

This experience forever altered Wiesel's faith in God. As he went through the celebrations of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that year, he could no longer remain silent. "Why should I bless Him?" he wrote. "In every fiber I rebelled. Because He had had thousands of children burned in His pits? Because He kept six crematories working night and day, on Sundays and feast days?"

The liturgies of the high holidays became for Wiesel occasions of

protest and lament. Such prayers may seem brazen to many Christians. Isn't it presumptuous of a mere mortal to speak this way to the one sovereign and omnipotent God? For Wiesel, such prayers were a way of breaking his silence with God and preserving his faith.

Not long after the young boy's hanging, a rabbi in the camp lost his faith. "It's the end," said the rabbi. "God is no longer with us." And then he recanted: "I know. One has no right to say things like that. I know. Man is too small, too humble and inconsiderable to seek to understand the mysterious ways of God." The rabbi could not reconcile the horrors around him with his belief in a merciful God. The death knell for his faith rang the moment his theology kept him silent in the face of genocide. He stopped believing that God would answer, so he stopped crying out.

Wiesel's commentary drives home this point: "Poor [Rabbi]. . . . As soon as he felt the first cracks forming in his faith, he had lost his reason for struggling and had begun to die."

To question God as Wiesel does is a birthright passed down from Jacob ("Israel" means "he struggles with God" (Gen. 32:28) and vocalized in the psalms. To lament is to keep alive the hope that God is listening even in the face of death. Wiesel shows us how lament, not silence, is the proper response of faith amid suffering and injustice. Lament breaks the silence and struggles to hold on to God and to life.

Suffering and Empathy

I realize I expose myself to criticism by placing our unfolding story of infertility alongside the experiences of slavery and the Holocaust. Our suffering seems pitifully small compared to the long histories of suffering and injustice against African Americans and Jews.

In his 2017 Netflix special *The Age of Spin*, comedian Dave Chappelle warns against the fruitlessness of

comparing our suffering to that of others. (He jokes about getting into a "who suffered more" debate with a Jewish friend. He thought he was doing well until his friend reminded him of Egypt.) A better path forward, says Chappelle, is to own our pain as a way of expanding our capacity to empathize with the suffering of others—"I suffer, you suffer. You suffer, I suffer." We should not disqualify our pain because it does not compare to that of others. Our pain can be an entry point for empathy and connecting with the suffering of others. We can take our place among the community of suffering people, or we can turn inward to isolation and despair.

Suffering, Solidarity, and Hope

Years ago I was a 34-year-old bachelor who had experienced several painful relationships and feared I was headed for a lifetime of singleness. Over dinner with a couple experiencing infertility, the woman asked me if I still prayed for a wife. I sighed and said, "Honestly, it depends on the day." After some silence she responded, "I still pray for a wife for you." Because she had entered into suffering with me, her words had power. After wiping away my tears, I asked her if she still prayed for a child. She said, "It depends on the day." I told her that I held out hope and committed to asking God to give them a child. It's with the solidarity of friends willing to put skin in the game that we dare to speak of hope.

My wife and I have experienced beautiful expressions of solidarity in recent months. Solidarity has come in the form of a friend's words. Having lost his son and then struggling with infertility, this friend is intimately acquainted with the monthly toll of hoping and disappointment. "The loss of our son was so sudden," he told me. "We were thrown into a place where all we could do was grieve and lament. But with infertility it was different. The struggle was learning how to live with ongoing disappointment in God." His words pierced my loneliness.

Solidarity has also come in the tears and anger of our friends Andrew and Steven, who have taken our fears and hurts to heart. Their presence has been a salve on our wounds. And solidarity has come to us in the faithful prayers of close friends who offer their tears to us and commit to interceding before the Father when we are too weak to do so ourselves.

Like many others, my wife and I do not have definitive answers from the doctors or from God. We do not know if the Father will let this cup pass from us or if we must drink it. But we do know that it is only in the community of the suffering that we can stand in solidarity, crying out in lament to God for ourselves and for others, asking that God will not be silent. **B**

For Further Reading

- » Allan Boesak's wonderful book *Dare We Speak of Hope? Searching for a Language of Life in Faith and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) gets to the heart of the complexities of hoping in contexts of oppression and suffering.
- » Pew Research Center, "Key Facts About Unauthorized Immigrants Enrolled in DACA."
- » "Inside the Memorial to Victims of Lynching," 60 Minutes, April 8, 2018.



Cory Willson is the Jake and Betsy Tuls Assistant Professor of Missiology and Missional Ministry and director of the Institute for Global Church Planting and Renewal at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich.

1. Why do you think Christians are prone to rely on "pithy optimism" and "theological platitudes" in the face of suffering?
2. Recall a time when you sat in solidarity with someone in their...

READ MORE ONLINE

The Belgic Confession

In what ways does the Belgic Confession still speak to us today?



Karin Maag is director of the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies at Calvin College. She is a member of Woodlawn CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich

"WE ALL BELIEVE IN OUR HEARTS. . ."

A document written by a pastor in hiding who was eventually captured by authorities and executed.

A book whose contents were so challenging to the powers of the day that the only way to get it into the hands of the ruler without imperiling the author was to toss the book over a castle wall. A text so popular that it went through 11 editions in three languages in just five years.

A document so clear and so articulate that it was quickly adopted as one of the standards of the Reformed faith, first for the churches of the Netherlands and then wherever these churches spread around the world.

The text is the Belgic Confession. Written in a time of religious upheaval, the Belgic Confession sought to present to King Philip II of Spain, a Roman Catholic, the Reformed beliefs of up to 100,000 of his subjects in the Low Countries of northern Europe. The author, pastor Guy (Guido) de Bres, had been serving the "churches under the cross" in modern-day Belgium. His confession, originally written in French and first published in 1561, was rapidly translated into Dutch and German and officially accepted at the 1566 Synod of Emden as a foundational confession of faith for Dutch Reformed churches. The Catholic political authorities in the Netherlands captured De Bres and hanged him as a rebel in 1567.

The Belgic Confession has a powerful early history. But does it have any lasting significance for our churches today? Is it more than a historical document established as one of the three confessional standards of

the Christian Reformed Church? In what ways can it still speak to us?

First, it can be a teaching and discussion tool. The confession offers a relatively compact and accessible text, handily organized by topic, making it an ideal guide for high schoolers or adults to learn what we believe.

Next, as noted by Pastor Bryant de Kruyter of Woodlawn CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.), the confession provides time-tested language that preachers can use to clarify and explain key Reformed doctrines.

Last, the Belgic Confession can be a resource for personal reflection. In a world where personal faith can sometimes feel unrooted it's good to reflect more deeply on what and why we believe so that we can indeed stand ready to give an account of the hope that is in us.

Confessions and creeds do not cover every area of Christian life (the Belgic Confession has little to say about creation care or God's call to justice, for instance), and they should always be used in conjunction with Scripture and prayer. We also must remember the historical context that shaped the text. The fear that Catholics would view the Reformed as religious radicals, for instance, helps explain the repeated critique of the Anabaptists.

But this confession does link Reformed believers across time and geography, from one pastor writing to defend and explain his people's faith centuries ago in Europe to Reformed believers around the world today who can still proclaim, "This holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or certain people. (Belgic Confession, Article 27). 

READ MORE **ONLINE**

Loving Small

Here, much of life
is about loving
small among our
friends. We are
learning to slow
down, to do small
gestures that seek
no great outcome,
no cosmic change.



Shawn Sikkema is an urban missionary pastor with Jesus at Colfax Ministries, a ministry he cofounded with his wife, Diane. He is an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church.

I AM SITTING in a bank on East Colfax, helping my friend Alice* open an account—a small thing. She's clearly anxious, her hands shaking as she fills out forms. I ask myself, Is this love? This is a question I've asked frequently since my wife, Diane, and I left behind a church in the suburbs to be street pastors among people who live in extreme poverty.

We met Alice, her husband, Fred,* and her son, Colton,* at one of the run-down motels where we serve. Colton lives with a disability from head trauma; Alice, from abuse. Fred, easily the healthiest of the three, kept them afloat, managing their meager money and navigating motel life. We visited regularly, dropping off food, catching up, and praying.

Fred suddenly died. Diane walked over from our motel to offer support. She found the family grieving and rudderless, the ship's captain gone. Diane discovered that Alice had inheritance money coming, not from Fred but from her dad. Alice showed Diane a legal document, four pages she didn't understand. I got a copy and sent it to a lawyer friend.

Alice had several thousand desperately needed dollars coming. I explained the form. The lawyer avoids talking directly with her, so we call him together. They won't release the money unless she has a bank account.

I ask Alice if she has one. Not surprisingly, the answer is no. Few of our flock do. I offer to pick her up and take her to the bank—a small thing.

So here at the bank I sit, occasionally helping. Again, the question, persistent and penetrating: Is this love? I mean this small act of helping open the account, but also bringing

food, praying, copying a document, forwarding it to a lawyer friend, talking to Alice, calling her lawyer, helping her get up into my old truck, and taking her to the bank, all mixed with small prayers—Is this love? As a pastor and communicator, I spent years doing big things. Now I do small things. Small acts, small things, small prayers. Nothing of note, nothing too hard. Is this love?

Mother Teresa, ever my teacher, said this: "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." I puzzle on that. My odd journey has been from big to small, a reality now in sharp focus with Alice—one small act after another. How do I do these small things with great love?

I wish Mother Teresa were here. I want to ask her about great love. I guess her answer: "Shawn, as you do small acts, hold Alice in your heart. Value her, treasure her as a gift from God. Look past her poverty and her tics. See Jesus in her; be Jesus to her. Let Jesus' love flow between you."

Some days that comes easily. I look at Alice, struggling and anxious, and see in her the beauty of God's creation, the wonder of what God has made. I feel the great privilege of doing a few small things for her. Small acts, great love. Today that makes beautiful sense.

Other days, not so much. I have small acts to do but don't want to do them. I might be tired, might resent the demands, might even resent the person. Usually I push through, do the act, and force some cheerfulness. But I feel no great love. Again I hear Mother Teresa: "Do the small act anyway. Love is the act, not the feeling. Don't worry about an inner buzz. Act!" She herself struggled with years of inner

Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohorquez

spiritual barrenness, yet served many. Small acts, great love, felt or not.

A phrase comes to capture this: “Loving small.” Loving small means doing small things, helpful things, things not all that striking, but doing them with great love, doing them when we feel like it, doing them when we don’t. Loving small is great love.

If we are to follow Jesus well every day of our lives, we must love our neighbors, often through small acts. No doubt we are called to more than that. Some will love through big things. Some will be called to advocate in a broader arena. All must use our work to glorify God. Our Reformed faith calls us to that.

Yet we are never called to anything less than loving small. I find it easy to miss that, focusing on things bigger and broader in service of Jesus.

The call to love small is under our nose, present in our homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces. What might happen in our world if each of us daily embraced that call in up-close places?

But we must also love “small” with people who are poor in body or spirit—people like Alice. There is a tension in the Bible. On the one hand

we are called to love everyone, wherever we are. On the other, God calls us to a special love for people on the margins, those lost in the shadows.

Diane and I have had an odd yet beautiful journey, moving from a large church in a wealthy suburb to life among people who are poor. Here, much of life is about loving small among our friends. We are learning to slow down, to do small gestures that seek no great outcome, no cosmic change, just befriending the people God places in our lives, showing the love of Jesus.

What if we each took this call to love the marginalized seriously? Here, in our motels, almost everyone lives on the margins. The need is staggering. I pray for Jesus to send more of us to these places. Yet the Alices of the world are everywhere, hidden in the shadows, overlooked and ignored in every community. What if each Jesus-follower found one shadow-dweller and committed to loving them? What if we did that not by treating that person as a project or by trying to fix his or her life, but as a humble friend and servant who is willing to do small things? Things that make you wonder: Is this love?

A good friend who is a student of revivals reminds me that most of God’s great moves started among people living in poverty. Might we be on the verge of another such moment? If so, will Jesus find us on the margins, in the shadows, loving people small in a million ways? Here it is not about our robust theology nor the scope of our accomplishments. Here it is about loving one person at a time in mundane ways. No flash, no dash. Just simple friendship.

Back at the bank there’s a problem: Alice can’t use her motel address to open the account. Another insult. I am angry and let it show, a small act aimed at defending Alice’s dignity. I offer our suburban address, and they accept. Another small thing.

All along, the question roars, Is this love?

Now comes the answer, thundering in my head, pounding in my heart. A chorus of voices—Jesus, my parents, Mother Teresa, others too—rises above this bank, above East Colfax, above a fallen world, and proclaims: Yes! Yes! A thousand times yes! This is love, these small things, loving small—perhaps the greatest love we can offer. **B**

**All names have been changed.*

Steering a Course for Artificial Intelligence

THE MOVIE *Wall-E* is a tale of a dystopian future in which obese, passive humans are relegated to a large, ark-like ship in which automated systems take care of everything. In one climactic scene, the captain wrestles to take back control of the ship, changing the course for all humanity.

Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have demonstrated remarkable progress in applications such as controlling autonomous vehicles, analyzing medical images, and performing complex business tasks.

These impressive developments have prompted a wide range of responses. Anthony Levandowski, a former Google and Uber engineer, helped establish a group called “Way of the Future” to “develop and promote the realization of a Godhead based on Artificial Intelligence” and “through understanding and worship of the Godhead, [to] contribute to the betterment of society” (Wired, 9/27/17). As if it were a modern tower of Babel, some are putting their trust in AI.

On the other side are those like inventor and entrepreneur Elon Musk, who has called AI “our biggest existential threat.” Fears about AI range from job loss to grim predictions of a robot uprising that will destroy humanity (a narrative reflected in many science fiction movies).

In the midst of these voices, how might a Christian perspective enable us to join the dialogue about AI? First, we must recognize that AI represents new possibilities in creation. As a part of creation it can, in principle, be directed in God-honoring ways despite the possibility for sinful distortions. While many researchers focus on

what AI can do, we need to begin to discern what we ought to do with AI.

John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* opens by asserting that true wisdom consists of two parts: knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves. In discerning what we ought to do, we need to answer the prior question of who we are before God. This question is also crucial for the engineers who shape the tools that shape us.

Like the captain in *Wall-E*, we have been given the responsibility to steer the direction of AI. If we pursue whatever technology can do, we will allow it to steer us to places with troublesome consequences. If we steer it in more obedient ways, aligning with God’s intents, we will open up new opportunities for flourishing. 



Derek Schuurman is a Canadian serving as a professor of computer science at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. He writes and speaks on topics surrounding faith and technology and attends Shawnee Park CRC.



Won't You Be My Neighbor?

reviewed by Otto Selles

While nostalgia is definitely a big part of the attraction of this documentary, the main attraction is the character and vision of Fred Rogers. As a Presbyterian seminary student in the 1950s, Rogers immediately recognized the power of television. In one interview he says, “Love is at the root of everything—all learning, all parenting, all relationships. Love, or the lack of it. And what we see and hear on the screen is part of who we become.” Once ordained, Rogers never became pastor of a church but made Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood his lifelong calling. Although he wanted to provide a safe, calm place for children, he didn’t shy away from addressing life’s problems or contentious social issues. His pastoral vocation was to use TV to show God’s love for children, whoever and whatever they might be. On disc now. (Focus)

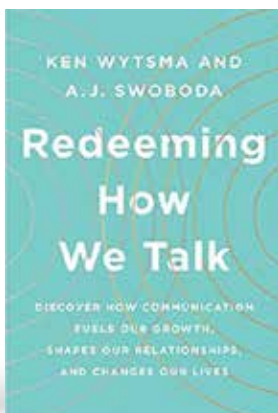


Love Is Dead

by Chvrches

reviewed by Micah van Dijk

Chvrches is a three-piece synth-rock band from Glasgow, Scotland, whose atmospheric pop songs feature soaring vocals. Despite the album's title, the group isn't paralyzed or depressed as they evaluate the pulse of a contemporary society that lacks love and empathy; they instead eagerly paint a picture of a future where empathetic love could possibly thrive again. While they do not identify as Christians, they aren't afraid to explore spiritual themes. *Love Is Dead* is a substantive pop album for listeners who want to consider the more challenging questions of life. (Glassnote)

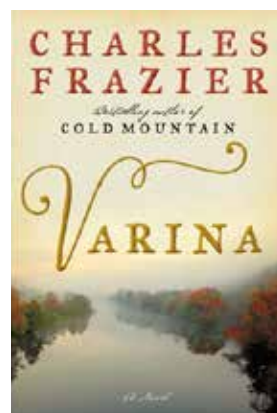


Redeeming How We Talk: Discover How Communication Fuels Our Growth, Shapes Our Relationships, and Changes Our Lives

by Ken Wytsma and
A.J. Swoboda

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

According to Wytsma and Swoboda, "there is a deep spirituality to words." The number of ways to communicate and the amount of available information have both increased dramatically. Christians need to ask deep questions in order to use words redemptively. The authors show how God uses words "to create, free, and establish," but Satan uses words "to divide, hurt, marginalize, and deconstruct." Especially helpful is the chapter "To Speak a Better Word," which offers practical suggestions for making communication a "redemptive art" to use as people of influence both in public roles and in relationships with friends, children, and spouses. (Moody)



Varina

by Charles Frazier

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Varina Howell longed for a calm, secure life when she married the older landowner Jefferson Davis. Instead she was catapulted into the public eye when Davis became President of the Confederate States of America. Years later, she daily lived out the truth that "being on the wrong side of history carries consequences." Her childhood musings on the "strangeness" of owning other people grew into a full-fledged understanding of her participation in the Confederacy's endorsement of slavery. In this historical fiction based on the real Varina Howell Davis, author Charles Frazier shows how ordinary people are swept up into the tragic events of history and how each carries responsibility for individual choices. (Ecco)

The Lowdown

Anniversary: This year begins the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt; for educational resources including a who's who and a timeline, go to <https://calvin.edu/centers-institutes/meeter-center/about-the-synod-of-dordt/>.

Give It Up: *The Hate U Give*, Angie Thomas' critically acclaimed young adult novel dealing with race issues, has been made into a movie due out this month. Check out our online review of the novel at thebanner.org. (20th Century Fox)

Dig It: Genre-bending rockers Twenty One Pilots, whose Christian faith influences their sometimes dark and painful lyrics, follow up the success of their *Blurryface* album with the cryptic album *Trench*, to be released October 5. (Fueled by Ramen)

What Does It Mean to Be Biblical?

Faith is the joyful willingness to submit our individual stories to the Bible's universal story in such a way that it continually wakes us up and shakes us up.



Mike Wagenman is the Christian Reformed campus minister and professor of theology at Western University in London, Ont., and part-time New Testament instructor at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont.

YOU'RE AT THE BOOKSTORE and you notice these titles: *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*. *The Year of Living Biblically*. *How to Preach Biblically*. *How to Save a Marriage Biblically*. But what does it mean to be biblical?

Plenty of authors suggest you'll be biblical if you memorize a few key verses from the Bible or if you follow some Old Testament laws with awkward literalism. Other people assume that having a collection of theological proof texts at hand or some favorite devotional passages earmarked in one's Bible is the basis of a "biblical" faith. But none of these things makes us biblical.

Being biblical depends first on our goal. It's hard to be biblical, for example, if our goal is to be rich because the Bible consistently identifies God as being on the side of the poor. Being biblical is only truly possible if our goal is to be a faithful and dynamic disciple of Jesus.

Being biblical also means approaching the Bible as a story—not as a worldview, a philosophy, or a set of life principles.

We are not being biblical when we rip Bible passages from their context. Instead we must seek to understand Bible passages in light of the Bible's grand story, which stretches from creation and the fall to redemption and a renewed creation.

We are not being biblical when we divide this grand story of the Bible into parts that can be used to endorse our culture's idolatrous story, or when we interpret the Bible to say what we think it ought to say.

We are not being biblical when we sift the Bible through the screen of

what we already know we want to hear, or when we refuse to allow the Bible to confront us with its challenges, instead editing the text so it comforts us only with sentimentality.

Being biblical, then, means approaching the Bible as the story that shapes our whole life. As God's authoritative story, the Bible invites us to inhabit its storied world because it's the truest understanding of the world that's possible, and then to comport ourselves accordingly. Being biblical means being shaped to the core of our being. That includes our lifestyles, habits, decisions, thoughts, beliefs, even our most intimate hopes and dreams and the means by which we seek to make them a reality.

Being biblical is excruciatingly hard and painful work. But it results in the story of the Bible saturating both our inner and outer worlds so we naturally see ourselves as poor, plaintive servants of the Lord rather than as proud, in-control masters of our own fates.

All this is what we mean by approaching the Bible in faith. Faith is the joyful willingness to submit our individual stories to the Bible's universal story in such a way that it continually wakes us up and shakes us up.

The result of being biblical is not that we know more about the Bible. It's that through the Bible we become Christlike at our core because we have encountered the living God through the working of God's Spirit. We will be Christlike not just with external conformity or as a way to try to earn God's favor, but in a genuine, authentic, and grateful way. **B**

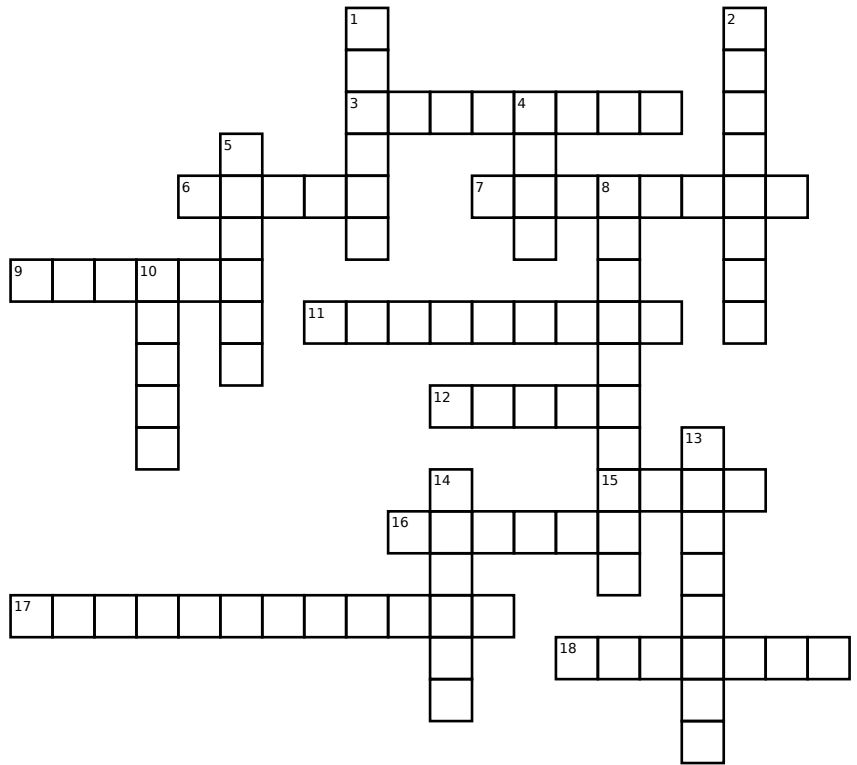
Find clues to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*. See the answers next month!

Down

1. Author of Belgic Confession
2. No longer mandatory at TWU
4. Meals rich in this can raise hemoglobin
5. Give back to him what is his
8. Name of street Shawn Sikkema's ministry is named after
10. Campus ministry at Grand Rapids Community College
13. What has swung too far
14. Name of organization founded by Jean Vanier

Across

3. What does it mean to be _____?
6. Another word for corn
7. A South-side Chicago ministry
9. Might use these instead of words to express feelings
11. What Van Haitsma's class created
12. Calvary CRC's Monday night activity
15. Mr. _____ Rogers
16. Wife of Jefferson Davis
17. Artificial _____
18. Kaitlyn Rauwerda's sport



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Congregational

CHURCH'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY

DCCRC TURNS 75 Join Washington, DC CRC in America's capital city on November 3-4, 2018 as we celebrate "God's Faithfulness to All Generations: 75 Years at DCCRC." Send questions or memories to anniversary@dccrc.org.

SAN DIEGO CRC is celebrating 75 years of God's faithfulness. Former members and friends are invited to attend a celebration service at 10:00am, November 18, 2018. To God Be The Glory! Send questions and memories to: larryhoeksema@gmail.com

CHURCH'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

FAITH CRC - PELLA, IA is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. Please come and celebrate with us on October 14, 2018, at the 9:30 AM worship service.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY

We are pleased to announce that **ELIAS GROENENDYK** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director.

We are pleased to announce that **JASON RUIS** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director.

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We are pleased to announce that **STEVEN DYKSTRA** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director.

Church Positions Available

PASTOR we at First CRC of Allendale, MI are looking for a lead pastor to help us connect with God in Worship, to Grow our faith, and to Serve our community. If you are interested in sharing your faith and story with us, please contact our search committee at: SearchCom@firstallendalec.org.

PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP CrossPoint Church, Chino, CA (35 mi E of Los Angeles) is seeking a Pastor of Discipleship. Visit www.crosspointcwc.org/employment to obtain a Ministry Description and Church Profile.

MT. VIEW CRC in Lynden, Washington is seeking a full-time Senior Pastor to shepherd our flock of 120 professing members. For more information on this position please contact Kevin Sterk, Search Committee Chairman, at kdkidsncows@frontier.com

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

PASTOR Upon the retirement of our present pastor, Ocheyedan IA CRC is seeking a full time pastor to help us grow in God's Word so we can serve God and others. Visit ocheyedancrc.org for more details.

SENIOR PASTOR South Grandville CRC in Grandville, MI is seeking a dynamic pastor with excellent visioning and leadership skills. The pastor will promote an environment to affect a passion for evangelism. The pastor should be teachable, humble, responsible, have good communication skills, and a heart for leading God's people to reach the lost. Visit southgrandvillechurch.org/search.

GRACE CRC, CHATHAM, ONTARIO seeks a Lead Pastor. Our prospective pastor will be one who is an energetic, humble shepherd with a serving spirit and a warm personality, encouraging to God's flock. An ability to inspire the congregation through teaching the Word, preaching application, and encouraging discipleship. We seek someone who has a passion for and is a friend of youth. Please contact the Search Committee at themiddels@gmail.com or call 519.358.6248

SENIOR PASTOR The congregation of Graafschap CRC in beautiful Holland, MI is beginning the search for a Senior Pastor to provide leadership following the retirement of our pastor, Stan Scripps in April 2019. Our congregation has a great heritage to build on, paired with our commitment



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DORDT COLLEGE

Dordt College is seeking applications for the following areas beginning August 2019:

Faculty Positions

- Agriculture
- Art
- Theatre Arts
- Theology

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Application reviews will begin immediately. Qualified persons committed to a Reformed, Biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to follow the faculty application procedure at the link below.

Dr. Eric Forseth, Provost  
Dordt College  
498 4<sup>th</sup> Ave NE  
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697  
[provost@dordt.edu](mailto:provost@dordt.edu)  
[www.dordt.edu](http://www.dordt.edu) — About Dordt — Job Openings

Dordt College endeavors to diversify its staff within the framework of its mission. The commitment of the college to nondiscrimination on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, national or ethnic origin, or race is consistent with federal and state requirements for nondiscrimination in employment.

to become all that God wants us to be in the future...changes and all. Our hope is that this group of 300+ members will work together with the leadership of the next pastor to: Grow God's ministry in us--attaining personal spiritual maturity through the disciplines of worship and second, to more effectively reach our community and incorporate new believers into our communal Christian life. If interested, please contact the search committee secretary, Joe Geurink @joegeurink@gmail.com for a job description, a specific list of our qualifications for ministry and to facilitate the first steps in getting to know you as a possible candidate.

**ASSOCIATE PASTOR** First Christian Reformed Church of Ripon, CA is seeking a full-time Associate Pastor who is a devout man of God, deeply appreciates Reformed theology, and who resonates with the mission and core values we hold to as a church. The applicant should have the gifts to develop an assimilation ministry, support and help expand a children's ministry, and assist the senior pastor with teaching and preaching. For a full job description and to apply, please visit our website at [www.riponfirstcrc.org](http://www.riponfirstcrc.org).

**PASTOR** Ideal Park CRC of Wyoming, MI, "A small church with a big heart" is looking for a pastor, full-time or part time (bi-vocational or commissioned), who can help us grow in God's word, and who would help us make a difference in reaching our community for Christ. If interested please contact: Jim at [hkjimh@gmail.com](mailto:hkjimh@gmail.com)

**PASTOR** Oakdale Community CRC is seeking an inspiring and challenging pastor who has strong Biblical knowledge and teaching that applies to everyday life. Oakdale is located in the Central Valley of California, nestled between the majestic mountains of Yosemite and the Pacific Ocean. Contact Kurt Hoekstra ([hoekstrakurt@gmail.com](mailto:hoekstrakurt@gmail.com)) for more information.

**SEEKING PASTOR:** Following a deliberate process of transition, Maranatha CRC in Edmonton, AB seeks a full-time

Pastor to serve a multi-cultural congregation that has a blend of Caucasian, Karen (Myanmar), African and Asian members. We desire a Pastor who will deliver sound, Biblical preaching that intentionally integrates the variety of cultures in our congregation and community. The Pastor will foster the importance of music in worship and actively visit and encourage members in their faith walk. To inquire or apply, go to [maranathacrc.ca](http://maranathacrc.ca) for our church profile or email us at [ministry@telus.net](mailto:ministry@telus.net).

**DIRECTOR/PASTOR OF WORSHIP** Crestview Church, in Boulder, CO is searching for a part time position (15-20 hrs/wk) to lead our worship ministry. Contact Marty Huisjen [martinhuisjen@msn.com](mailto:martinhuisjen@msn.com) or Mark Quist [mquist4neighboring@gmail.com](mailto:mquist4neighboring@gmail.com)

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### Birthdays

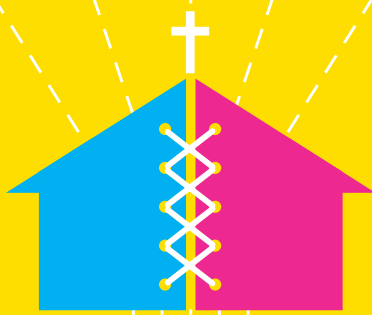
#### 100TH BIRTHDAY



**THELMA (MEEUWSEN) JOHNSON** will celebrate her 100th birthday on October 30, 2018. Her husband Alvin passed away in 2000. Thankful to God for her love and faithful Christian life are her four children, Herm & Marie, Joyce & Ed Zylstra, Ken & Joyce, Jim & Marcee, 7 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren. Also, 3 step-grandchildren and 8 step-great grandchildren. Greetings may be sent to 500 Parkside Drive #264, Zeeland, MI 49464.

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March 21 – April 1 | *John & Lynda Witte*

##### The Gospel Comes to Italy

March 28 – April 9 | *Dr. Jeffery Weima*

##### Netherlands Waterway Cruise

April 12 – 20 | *Henk & Thressa Witte*

##### Church Tour of China

April 23 – May 9 | *Wayne & Lynn TenHarmse*

##### Alaska Cruise

September 2019 | *Mindy Alexander*

##### Tour of the Balkans

September 10 – 25 | *John Witte*

##### Ancient Empires

##### Mediterranean Cruise

September 11 – 24 | *Henk & Thressa Witte*

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## 90TH BIRTHDAY

**HARV BROUWER** of 2111 Raybrook SE Apt #4000, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 will celebrate his 90th birthday on October 8. Praising God for his love and endless acts of service are his children: Kathy & Larry Wells, Brian & Jan Brouwer, Karla & Dan Harris, Tim & Laura Brouwer and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

**CATHERINE DE WAAL MALEFYT** will celebrate her 90th birthday October 30 in Franklin Lakes. Thank you, Mom, for your love and guidance for our family. We praise God for your example of a Proverbs 31 woman.

**AUDREY (NIEBOER) HUIZENGA** - Hartsfield Village, 10000 Columbia Ave., Munster, IN 46321, celebrates her 90th birthday on October 21. Her five children and their spouses: Christy and Bud Van Genderen, Jerry and Kathy, Mark and

Cindy, Brian and Karen, Alan and Mary; 15 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren give thanks for her long and loving life. Great is Thy faithfulness!

**SHIRLEY ANN SWEETMAN** (SMITH) celebrates her 90th birthday on October 25, 2018. Shirley was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and attended Calvin College where she met her husband Ivan Sweetman (deceased). Shirley and Ivan moved to Colorado, started their family and became deeply rooted in their community, serving as founding members of the Third Christian Reformed Church in Denver. Shirley has four children (Christie, Linda, Sally, and Ross), 14 grandchildren, and 11 great grandchildren. Shirley is a steadfast example of how to live a life for Christ and is a blessing to her family, church, and community. Shirley is known for her thoughtfulness - always sending cards and supporting her friends and family in prayer.

Happy 90th birthday to an amazing mother, grandmother, great grandmother!

**HERMINA SYTSMA** will celebrate her 90th birthday on September 15. A fine celebration was had in August attended by her 5 children and spouses, many grandchildren and great grandchildren. Cards may be sent to 1050 S. Euclid Ave., Unit 2206, Elmhurst, IL 60126.

## Anniversaries

### 60TH ANNIVERSARY



#### BEIMERS-60TH ANNIVERSARY

Andy (Andries) and Johanna Beimers (nee Zandbergen). "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." - Psalm 119:105. We celebrate God's faithfulness and goodness in the lives of our parents, grandparents and great-

grand parents as they celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. Starting out in Pembroke, Ontario, and now residing in New Westminster, British Columbia, their family has now grown to include 5 children and spouses, 16 grand children and 21 great-grandchildren (2 already with the Lord). With all our love: John and Lynn Beimers, Sophie and Mike Nagtegaal, Margaret and Ed Hummelman, Andrew and Laura Beimers, and Matthew and Bev Beimers. Soli Deo Gloria.

**DEVRIES** Francis & Mary (Zwart) Welland Ont. With thankfulness to the Lord we celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of our parents married Oct 10 1958 in Trenton Ont. Tricia and John Lammers, Wilma and Andy Veldman, Teresa and Bert Wikkerink, Debbie DeVries, 16 grandchildren, 8 great grandchildren. Psalm 32:8

**KUIPER** Clarence J. and Marcella of 8700 Dunkelow Road, Franksville, WI 53126 will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on September 12, 2018. Children: Timothy (Marcia) Kuiper, Terri (Scott) Johnson, 5 grandchildren, and 2 great grandchildren. To God be the glory.

## Obituaries

**HUTT** Ralph, age 85, of Newark, NY, passed away on July 31, 2018 in Lyons, NY, after a fifteen year battle with Parkinson's Disease. Preceded in death by his two siblings, a brother Sidney, and a sister, Marlene. He is survived by five sisters and six brothers, his wife N. Grace (Aukeman) Hutt of 64 years, his children Joyce Hutt, James (Pennie) Hutt, Shirley (Mark) Malak, Nancy Suess; 6 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren.

**KING** Ella, age 67, of Wyckoff, NJ, went to her heavenly home on August 17, 2018. Born in Goshen, NY to Cornelius and Emma (Drenth) Van De Weert, Ella resided in Wyckoff since 1972. A member of the CRC of Midland Park, NJ, she served as a Stephen's minister and as chairperson of the faith promise committee. Surviving is her husband of 46 years, John, daughter Sheryl (Richard Pierce), and son John Jr, as well as grandchildren Richard John, Julia, and Daniel Evan. Also surviving are brothers Gary and Martin and many nieces and nephews. Ella was pre-deceased by her sisters Minnie Pruiksmas and Emma Jellema, and brothers, Peter, Cornelius, Barney, Herman, John and Albert.

**QUIST-DIK**, Donna A. (Smith), age 88, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on August 9, 2018. She was preceded in death by her husbands, Lawrence Quist and Ralph Dik; her son, David Quist; sister, Carolyn Kass; brothers-in-law, Dr. Roger Wassink, Leonard Quist; sister-in-law, Lucille Quist. Donna is survived by her son, Robert (Melanie) Quist; daughter, Diane Siegfried; grandchildren, Amanda, Michael, Scott, Anthony, Claire, Marta; sister, Ellen Wassink; brother-in-law, Walter Kass; stepchildren, Rev. Jack (Sandra) Dik, David (Barbara) Dik, Gloria (Jeff) Davis, Darrell (Rebecca) Dik; many loving step-grandchildren and step-great grandchildren.



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**TAZELAAR**, Ronald W. age 74, went home to be with his LORD and Savior, 2936 Portage Street, Naperville, IL 60564. Beloved husband of Karen, nee Andersen; loving father of Ron (Annie) Tazelaar, Stacy (Steve) Wieggers, Wendy (Anthony) Ventrella, and the late Kristen Tazelaar; dear son of Gertrude Tazelaar and the late Louis Tazelaar; devoted grandfather of Anthony, Alex, Joey and Jake Ventrella, Lauren and Chloe Wieggers, and Avery, Ronnie and Alexa Tazelaar; fond brother of Diane (Tom) Peterson; uncle of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to The Kristen Tazelaar Fund for Youth Mission Trips, c/o All God's Children, PO Box 5909, Villa Park, IL 60181 are appreciated.

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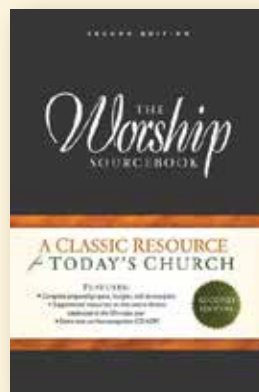
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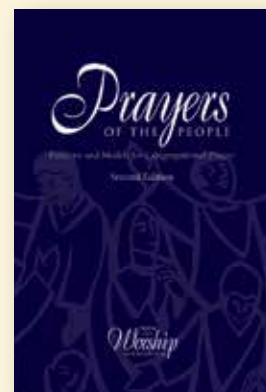
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# The Kindness of Women

I carry the gentle  
aftertaste of thankful  
words in my mouth  
for hours.



Melissa Kuipers is a fiction and creative nonfiction writer as well as the director of discipleship at Central Presbyterian Church. She lives in Hamilton, Ont.

**“THANK YOU** for this gift,” Sara says to me while cradling my newborn against her shoulder—as if I have graciously allowed her to hold my precious bundle rather than desperately needing someone to take him off my hands, as if I am the generous one in letting her clean my kitchen, visit us with groceries and diapers, make us meals rich in iron to get my hemoglobin back up, and bring sweet hand-made lactation bites to help my milk supply. As if I, exhausted and depleted, trying to ward off looming postpartum depression, am the one capable of giving. As if I have something to give.

Sara feeds the baby his bottle while I pump nearby. She burps him over her shoulder and he spits up a little down her back.

“It’s been so long since I’ve had the joy of watching a newborn sleep,” she says with reverence at the end of her visit as she leans over the baby’s bassinet. I had just finished dumping all my struggles on her. She took them all and affirmed me as a mother, woman, and friend. Then I went to bed while she did the dishes.

I am humbled again and again by the kindness of women around me: The friend who sat by my side through labor; the church ladies who delivered meals; the lactation consultant who gave me her cell number and responds to all my paranoid texts. These women give without keeping record, without any expectation of return. They give with abandon, with a grace that makes me feel unashamed to receive. They give with a joy that has inspired me and has assured me that I am not alone.

Without shaming, they remind me of gratitude. I have little emotional

reserve, but gratitude is something I can reach for in the middle of heartache, in the grasp of guilt, in the clutch of pain. It is a small sweetness in the bitterness of anxiety, but I carry the gentle aftertaste of thankful words in my mouth for hours.

“Thank you for this gift,” I find myself praying, rocking my baby as he stubbornly evades sleep in the middle of the night. It is a prayer I had forgotten to pray in the darkness of fatigue and frustration. “Thank you for this gift,” I pray as Katrina arrives with her children and a lunch spread, as Ann hands me bags of donated breast milk when I don’t have enough, when Ashley comes to clean my home for the weekend, and when Laura sits beside me and nods with understanding while I confess to feeling flooded with sadness when I’m supposed to be bathing in joy. “Thank you for this gift,” I say as person after person comes to offer me hospitality in my own home. “Thank you for this gift,” I repeat after they leave and I am alone with my helpless baby.

And yet they are still here, their voices echoing in my head as their actions speak God’s words: “You are a gift. You are a gift. You are a gift.” 

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