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- » Korean-American Pastors Make Revelation Accessible with New Commentary
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Cody J. Zuiderveen and Grady H. Zuiderveen // For better or for worse, our view of creation influences our view of God.



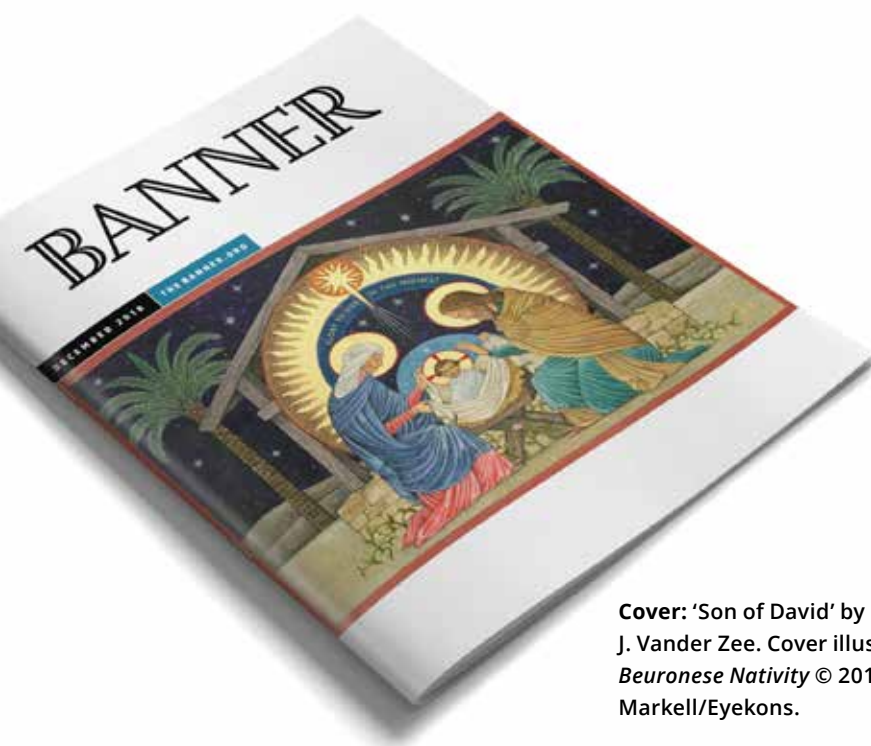
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Cover: 'Son of David' by Leonard J. Vander Zee. Cover illustration: *Beuronese Nativity* © 2018 Nicholas Markell/Eyekons.

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The Banner is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church

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Address Changes and Subscriptions 800-777-7270 or visit TheBanner.org

Classified Advertising 616-224-0725 classifieds@TheBanner.org

Display Advertising 616-224-5882 ads@TheBanner.org

Editorial 616-224-0824 editorial@TheBanner.org

News news@TheBanner.org

Published monthly (except August). Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Mich. Postmaster, send address changes to: *The Banner*, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407. Canadian publications mail agreement #40063614. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: *The Banner*, 3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington ON L7R 3Y8. Copyright 2018, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Printed in U.S.A. The Banner (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 153, No. 11, 2018.

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The Mind of Christ

As we gaze upon
the Christ-child
who laid aside his
glory for our sake,
let us lay aside our
pride, our need to
always be right,
for the sake of
Christ's kingdom.



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

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

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

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

THANK YOU, DEAR READERS, for your immense generosity. You are amazing. As of the time of writing this (late October), we have received over \$430,000 from more than 6,000 donors, already surpassing last year's totals. This is the second record-breaking year in a row for *The Banner's* fund-raising campaign. We are immensely grateful for your support. I thank God for your resounding support of *The Banner's* mission to provide information, ideas, and fresh insights to equip our readers to be biblically rooted ambassadors of Christ's reconciliation in today's world. Your generous support also means that we draw fewer funds from ministry shares, releasing those funds for other ministries.

I knew when I took this job that I could not please everybody. But I do take seriously what readers say. For example, in response to some complaints, we have slightly increased the font size of our classified ads. And we recently added a crossword puzzle ("Word Play") after some readers complained that *The Banner* has become "less fun" since we removed the humor page. These are experiments in addressing those issues.

But pleasing everyone is not *The Banner* editor's role. Everyone has an idea of what that role entails. Some see the editor as a pastor to the entire denomination. Others view it as a prophetic voice to "shake things up." I hear, on one hand, complaints that the *Banner* is "too political" and "too liberal," and on the other hand, that it is "not political enough" and "too conservative." *Why aren't you denouncing Trump and those who voted for him?* asked one email. And another, *Why aren't you strongly condemning abortion and same-sex marriage?*

I admit that I have sometimes doubted whether I could fulfill this calling. Often I struggle with my own ego and pride, especially when complaints come flooding in. That is why I am so grateful for your overwhelming support of our appeal campaign.

As editor-in-chief, I believe my role is both pastoral and prophetic. The trick lies in knowing when to be pastoral or prophetic, and how. Both pastors and prophets, though, should be serving up not what people want but rather what they need. And that may not always be the most popular choice. Therefore, I am concerned with the increasing polarization in the Christian Reformed Church. I suspect that some pastors face the same balancing act between divided factions in their congregations. How do we bring God's Christmas Word of "peace on earth" in such a polarized environment?

I think it begins by imploring all of us to have the "mind of Christ," who gave up his privilege and status of equality with God and humbled himself to be a helpless baby, to suffer and serve not his own interests but the interests of sinners and rebels against God (Phil. 2:5-8). The apostle Paul called a divided Philippian church—and us, by extension—to this Christ-like humility, to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. . . . [And] look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4, NRSV).

Could progressive Christians regard conservative Christians as better than them? Could conservative Christians look to the interests of progressive Christians? Could we practice Christ-like humility with each other?

This Christmas, as we gaze upon the Christ-child who laid aside his glory for our sake, let us lay aside our pride, our need to always be right, for the sake of Christ's kingdom. 



REPLY ALL

#ChurchToo

Thank you to Roxanne Van Farowe for her article “#ChurchToo: Lessons from Willow Creek” (Nov. 2018). I have worked independently for 22 years within Christian Reformed churches to address abuse issues, both sexual abuse and abuse of power. Most of the churches’ responses have been filled with denial, ignoring, dismissing victims, and “don’t make me uncomfortable.” Not until Synod 2018, which I attended with Bev Sterk and her Overture 2, have I finally witnessed genuine understanding and concern about abuse in the CRC. I ask, why? Why has it taken this long? Does it take a Willow Creek crash to wake us up and begin to realize that we too are guilty of this sin and should do something about it?

» Judy De Wit // Sioux Falls, S.D.

Every year, usually around synod time, we review the number of CRC congregations that have reported that they have a safe church/abuse prevention policy (“#ChurchToo: Lessons from Willow Creek”). This number has increased over the years, from 52 percent in 2012 to 74 percent in 2018. After Synod 2018, new data will be collected from churches regarding additional safe church practices, including education for children and training for church leadership. We are pleased that the CRC is recognizing the need to pay attention to additional safe church practices beyond policy.

» Bonnie Nicholas, Safe Church Ministry
// online comment

When Christian ‘Celebrities’ Fall

I appreciate *The Banner’s* acknowledgment of the fact that the Willow Creek board of elders felt compelled to resign (“When Christian ‘Celebrities’ Fall,” Oct. 2018) because of their blind support for Bill Hybels through his denial but more importantly for their failure to hold him accountable over the past years. What is very bewildering to me is our quick desire to find “golden truths” and good in the perpetrator’s legacy. It is disturbing that women are hardly mentioned here—and then only as “victims.”

They have been shamed and silenced for decades. What does biblical justice look like for women who suffer at the hands of powerful men?

» Jenny deGroot // Langley, B.C.

Loving Small

Our weekly prayer group at church enjoyed the article “Loving Small” (Oct. 2018). It reminded us that the small things we do and are asked to do for the people who are marginalized in our church and parish community are important, even when we wonder if they make an impact. Thank you for the article and for the encouragement it produced.

» Judy Gabrielse // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Digital Life

Thank you for your response concerning the question about writing complete sentences in a text message (“Digital Life,” Oct. 2018). I’m quite comfortable with the short, abbreviated style of text messaging simply because it’s practical and efficient. Typing on a screen is labor intensive and time consuming. Just need to get acquainted with the style! (I’m a retired guy, 62.)

» Jack Rintjema // Smithville, Ont.

Longing, Hope, and Solidarity

After reading Cory Willson’s article “Prayers of the Infertile: Longing, Hope, and Solidarity” (Oct. 2018), I am only now beginning to understand the career of my late husband, Dr. Richard Westmaas, in counseling the broken who came to his office. He often quoted Romans 5:5: “And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts.” He entered into the suffering of his patients.

» Evelyn Westmaas //
Grand Rapids, Mich.

This was the best article I’ve read about infertility and faith (“Prayers of the Infertile”). As someone who has struggled with infertility for nearly eight years, I greatly appreciated Willson’s reflections and *The Banner* for highlighting the complexities between faith, hope, and lament. Throughout my infertility journey, it is within the church that I have often felt the most heartache and shame. Many suffer from infertility in quietness and loneliness, but even those who have been vocal about their struggles can find their emotional, spiritual, and physical needs unmet. I urge churches and congregants to consider how they can better embrace those who are struggling with infertility.

» Jennifer Lucking // Brantford, Ont.

When Words Can’t Do It Justice

I really appreciated “When Words Can’t Do It Justice” (Sept. 2018) by Jim Payton. It reminded me of Corrie ten Boom’s devotional for July 2 in her book *Each New Day* titled “Marveling at His ‘Uns’ . . .

You Can't Take It with You

Unfathomable, Unchangeable, Unsearchable, Unutterable, Unimaginable, Unspeakable, Unnumbered." Try to get that book and make your own list of all those "uns." You will "stand amazed at the unfathomable complexity of God's wisdom and his knowledge." May this be a blessing to many more.

» Judy Oppewal // Pella, Iowa

What Are We Afraid Of?

Thank you for this editorial ("What Are We Afraid Of?," Sept. 2018). To add to this, in our divided world no one acts. Modern city existence has developed in us the habit of noninvolvement and detachment or withdrawal of feelings. We must stand up to evil and be heard.

» Andy A. Renema // Pitt Meadows, B.C.

Dear Puzzlers:

We goofed. Big time! Last month's Word Play crossword puzzle simply didn't work, no matter how hard you tried. As reader Roger Groenboom pointed out, "Perhaps it's an exercise in truly recognizing just how dead in sin we are—totally unable to save ourselves—totally depraved. This year being the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort . . . it all kind of makes sense."

For the corrected puzzle and answers, see page 43.

And we promise to do better next time.

RETIREMENT, I'm finding, is a time of reflection. Sometimes I wonder if, as a pastor, I've done enough teaching about estate and "stuff" management. When brothers aren't talking because of a rift over their mother's sewing machine, claimed by the one and wanted by the other, I grieve. When a family cannot sit together at the funeral because the fighting over possessions has already begun, I ask my wife, Shirley, "Are our affairs in order?" Regularly reading obituaries drives home our own mortality. This person was five years younger than us! What "stuff" could cause our own families to fight?

I knew I had something on this topic stashed away somewhere. From a funeral preparation source, I dug up some solid advice.

A letter of instructions is typically attached to the will or trust. The letter names those you designate to receive items of personal property. Personal items are truly important to people. By expressing in writing who gets which item of sentimental value, you are protecting your children's relationships. The reality is that adult children are more likely to fight over Grandma's quilt than over cash. When writing a letter of instructions, concentrate on things that couldn't be replaced in a fire. Ask your children if there's anything in particular they'd want to receive when you're gone. You might be surprised by their answers. If more than one person wants the same thing, you have the opportunity to resolve this before it becomes an issue when you're gone.

Applying the concept of sentimental value occasions considerable reflection. The gavel given at the synod I served as officer—does it mean

I wonder what
place our
"stuff" will
have in the
new creation.

anything to anyone? The *Shalom* signs given by parishioners because I always concluded the benediction with "shalom"—are they of sentimental value? Our grandfather clocks have been claimed, but what about the mantel clock given to my parents by my mother's parents, as was tradition? What about Shirley's sewing machine? Would my granddaughters really fight over her jewelry? Should we just sell anything gold and buy gravesites? And I don't even want to think about the Bible recording family births and deaths. Or my sermons. . . .

The reality of our being gone may be made moot by our Lord's return. I wonder what place our "stuff" will have in the new creation. In the meantime, it is our responsibility to handle it wisely. So I'll continue listing our stuff, email the lists to our children, and get their input. It could even be fun! 



George Vink is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. He served more than 40 years in parish ministry. He preaches locally and is a member of Covenant CRC in Cutlerville, Mich.

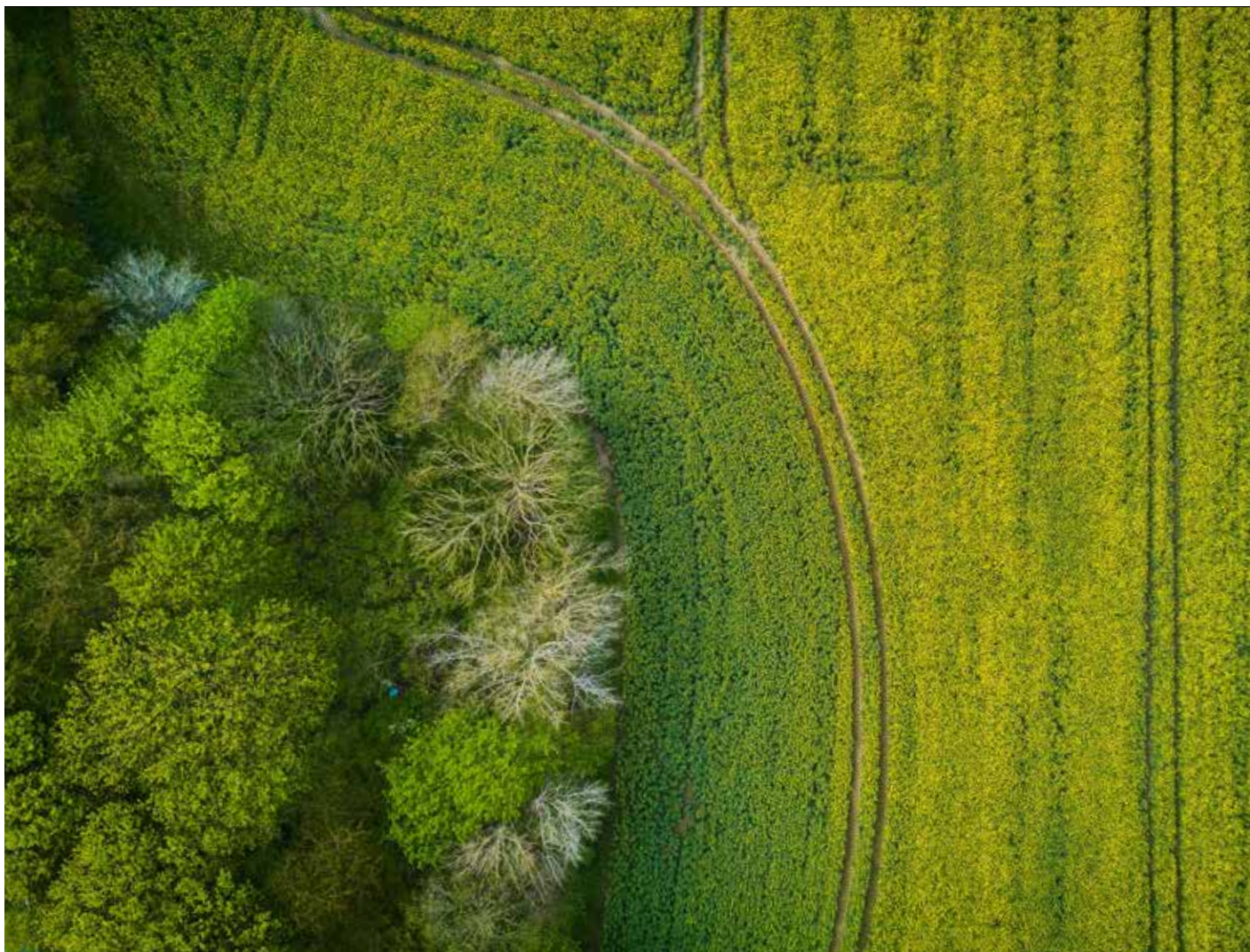


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God's Garden: Pleasing to the Eye and Good for Food

Cody J. Zuiderveen and Grady H. Zuiderveen

Since the creation of the world we have depended on plants to sustain and nourish our bodies. Given plants' importance, we can understand why God placed humans in the first garden "to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15). God recognized the inestimable worth of the creation God had made. It was central to human enjoyment and survival. As Genesis 2:9 tells us, "The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food."

God caused these beautiful trees to grow in an ancient garden called Eden. The creation story reveals that God saw the garden as extravagant in its provision and in its beauty. Not many places in the world today still meet both of those descriptions. Either the land is beautiful and kept protected, or it is good for food and ravished with ceaseless planting and harvesting. The Genesis account tells us there was a time when a garden could be both pleasing to the eye and good for food. That is still possible today.

In his commentary on Genesis, John Calvin maintained that all of creation tells us about God: "The intention of Moses, in beginning his Book with the creation of the world, is, to render God, as it were, visible to us in his works" (Vol. 1). By understanding God's works we can better understand God. Similarly, by misunderstanding God's works we can misunderstand God. This is what Thomas Aquinas was talking about when he suggested that "any error about creation also leads to an error about God" (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 11.3). For better or for worse,

our view of creation influences our view of God. If we want to know more about God, then we ought to listen to God's assessment of creation found in Genesis 2:9. God intended God's creation to be both good and beautiful.

God's assessment of the beauty and utility of the garden is the same as Eve's assessment before she disobeyed God and took the forbidden fruit. Notice that God and Eve both evaluate the garden as good and beautiful. The difference is in their responses. God noted the beauty of the garden and then assigned humanity to work it and take care of it—to make it prosper and grow (Gen. 2:15). When Eve noted the beauty of the same garden, she decided to take it for her own immediate gain (Gen. 3:6). She saw that it was good, but rather than promoting its well-being as God had intended when entrusting it to humanity, she desired to take it for herself.

It is not surprising, then, that the Hebrew term used to describe the precious beauty of the garden, *châmad* (*châmad*), is the same term the Hebrew language uses to express greed or covetousness. History shows that precious and beautiful objects evoke a desire in the beholder to obtain them. Thus Job laments, "They knew no quiet in their bellies; in their greed (*châmad*) they let nothing escape" (Job 20:20, NRSV). Right from the start, God made that which was pleasing and good. Shortly thereafter, we learned to steal from God's creation in search of our own personal pleasure.

When Adam and Eve cared for and preserved the beauty and fruitfulness of the garden, they walked with God and had all their needs met. When they disobeyed God and took what was not given to them to consume, they were cast from the garden and from the presence of God. The moment they stopped caring for the garden, the garden stopped caring for them. From there, Genesis reveals, Adam was made "to work the ground from which he had been taken" (Gen. 3:23). He had wrongfully taken from

the gift of abundance; the result was toil and hardship in expansive fields. The wisdom of Proverbs proved right: "Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise, but the fool devours it" (Prov. 21:20, NRSV). The author of Genesis would argue the same could be said of one's garden.

Faithful stewards of creation face the same task today that God gave to Adam and Eve. But humanity

God intended
creation to be
both good and
beautiful.

learned to exploit creation, and that's proven to be a hard lesson to unlearn. We have lost sight of the value of beauty in creation, preferring its quick and short-lived liquidation for immediate monetary gain. But God calls us instead to recapture a healthy appreciation for the intrinsic and extrinsic value of creation for both enjoyment and benefit.

The expectation is not that we preserve all of creation. God created us as compelled consumers—we must eat to survive. God also created us with the ability to care for the same plants and animals on which we rely. Sadly, the blessing of consumption often outweighs the corresponding blessing of stewardship. While we cannot put the proverbial fruit back on the tree, a new future is possible. We can give life to that which God uses to give life to us.

In creation, God has chosen to reveal God's self as the One who makes things that are both beautiful and good. If we lose sight of the breadth and depth of creation's value, we lose sight of the breadth and depth of our experience of God. When gardens

become devoid of beauty and are used only for our benefit, our coinciding view of God often follows close behind. If God becomes devoid of beauty in our eyes, God retains value for us only in providing increased wealth, security, or comfort. We consider God good only if God gives us good gifts. If creation is valued only for what it offers in a given moment, that same measure of worth is transferred to God. In God's garden, we are compelled to hold these two values together. The garden was good both for what it gave and for its beauty. We can say the same of God.

This is the nature of stewardship. To be true stewards, we must experience God's desire for the world. Stewards are able to delight in what they are caring for not because of what it gives them, but because of the One who entrusted it to them. The psalmist reminds us that "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1). As stewards of God's creation, "we are appointed earthkeepers and caretakers to tend the earth, enjoy it, and love our neighbors. God uses our skills for the unfolding and well-being of his world so that creation and all who live in it may flourish" (*Our World Belongs to God*, 10). 



Cody J. Zuiderveen is an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church serving as a missionary with Resonate Global Mission in Haiti. He lives with his wife, Jessica, and two children in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.



Grady H. Zuiderveen is a Ph.D. candidate in forest resources in the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management at Penn State University and an Au Sable Graduate Fellow for Christian environmental stewardship.

1. What is your view of creation? In what ways has it changed over time?

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BIG QUESTIONS

Vocation/Calling

Am I called to remain in my existing occupation, or am I called to forsake it for new opportunities for service?

At pivotal points in our paid work we must sometimes decide whether to remain where we are or move on to a new location. Some feel they need a whole new career or form of paid work; others feel drawn to new job offers within their existing profession. Many pastors, for example, are “second-career” pastors who felt called to leave their secular occupations to enter paid work in the church. Should the call of the first disciples to leave their nets to follow Jesus lead us to leave our current occupations?

Many Christians at Corinth thought their new Christian identity called them to forsake their social locations. Paul exhorts them to “lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. . . . In whatever condition you were in when you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God” (1 Cor. 7:17, 24, NRSV). This advice about vocation has often been used to justify conservative conformity to our social locations and what they demand. But this misinterprets the Pauline exhortation.

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes how different the calling in 1 Corinthians 7 sounds compared with the calling of the first disciples in the gospels. He resolves the apparent contradiction in two ways. One is to observe that the post-resurrection Christ is now present as the body of Christ in this

world. We do not have to leave the world to follow Christ; Christ now permeates this world through the Spirit.

The other part of his response is to stress that Christians should not conform to this world in their occupation but should “remain with God” in and through their callings. They should live out their call to be a Christian amid the callings they occupy in this world. Some occupations will be off limits to Christians because they are incompatible with the call to follow Christ. Other occupations will need to be transformed to become better avenues for serving God and neighbors in this world. This is hardly conservative conformism.

Leave for new places to which Christ is calling you, or stay where you presently are. But whether you stay or leave, live for Christ.

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

Digital Life

I sometimes get sick to my stomach when I read what people are saying to each other in their comments online. What can be done about it?

We are humans who live in a fallen world. We have a long history of hating people we don't know. Online

commenting is the latest and most efficient way we allow ourselves to set ourselves up against each other.

So do what I do: Stop reading the comments. Truly, unless I am reading a web page or blog posting on a topic I am specifically interested in, I don't bother to scroll down the page to see what everyone else thinks. I've learned that I—like many of you—can't be trusted to treat the person behind that tiny little picture or made-up name as a person and respond appropriately. I also know the more interaction we have online—of any sort—makes money for the companies that so cleverly rope us in. (Ironically, the term these companies use for this interaction is “engagement.”)

Can't stop yourself from reading comments online and responding? Here are some ideas.

First, if what you are reading was not something you went looking for, ask yourself if it's possible these unsolicited gems are bait—that is, something offered to you because you have a history of responding to them and not because your life is somehow enriched by them. Stay clear.

Second, to the extent that you can, check out the person you are about to respond to. Does this person have a pattern of caustic or bullying behavior online? If so, help this person by ignoring the comment. Attention is



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohorquez

the currency of the internet, and the best response often is no response.

Lastly, if you *must* respond, make sure your response addresses the larger issues raised rather than the last guy's response. Every now and again, begin your response with something civil like "I appreciate what's been said so far, but I wonder . . .".

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. Online dating seems to be more acceptable than ever. What's been your experience, good or bad? Tell him about it at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.

Church/Bible/Doctrine

I made profession of faith many years ago as a young teenager. But it was group pressure that made me do it, not a genuine belief in God. I have now come to a true faith. Can I make profession of faith again?

Absolutely! By all means! It isn't necessary, of course, since you've already been admitted into church membership. But if you have now truly experienced a new and vibrant faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, why wouldn't you shout it from the rooftops?

It sounds as if you're hesitating a little. Is it possible that you're comparing this to the rite of baptism? If you were to ask me the same question about wanting to be baptized again, I would say absolutely not. Why? Because baptism is a sacrament. In it, God is adopting you as his own, setting you aside to serve him and promising to be with you forever. God is the main actor, not you. And we must never doubt God's promise. Allowing rebaptism eventually casts doubt on what God has done. But profession of faith is different. It's not a sacrament. It's a liturgical rite, yes, but one in which *you* are the main actor, not God. *You* are confessing your faith. *You're*

making the commitment to follow your Lord and to join his body, the church. This commitment is repeated every time we say the Apostles' Creed together as God's people.

Let me hasten to add that, of course, this "true faith" you've now come to is God's gift to you. God is behind it all. Authentic faith is planted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And I don't mean to deny any of that. We must all thank God for doing what God promised in our baptisms. But the rite of public profession of faith is something we do in response to the Spirit's work.

Making profession of faith again should include your story. I'm convinced it would be a blessing to all if you told it yourself in a testimony or through the pastor.

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*.

Stewardship

I recently read that the city of San Francisco has banned plastic straws. I understand taking care of the environment, but isn't this going too far? Can't straws be recycled? Should Christians support or oppose such bans?

San Francisco is not the only city recently to ban plastic straws. Seattle passed a similar ban earlier this summer, and California recently passed a law allowing straws in restaurants only for patrons who request them. A number of coffee shops and restaurant chains also are phasing out straws as part of their service.

It is true that plastic straws are a very small part of plastic waste, but there are good reasons to move away from using them. Small plastics like straws are difficult to recycle and frequently foul recycling machines, making recycling more expensive. Also, plastic does not break down in

the environment, so a straw carelessly disposed becomes a forever blight, posing a hazard to wildlife and polluting God's creation. Don't dismiss the dangers as insignificant. The movement to ban plastic straws received its emotional push from a video that went viral in 2015 showing a sea turtle with a plastic straw trapped in its nostril.

Another reason for the movement to ban plastic straws is symbolic. Plastics are a major problem, from the Pacific garbage patch the size of several states to the absorption of microscopic plastic pieces by fish and other creatures. The move to cut back on plastics is only just beginning.

Christians, with love and concern for God's creation and God's creatures, should be aware of the effects of our lifestyles. Especially for a convenience item like a straw, we ought to be willing to accept a bit of inconvenience or extra effort in order to prevent damage or disrespect to God's world.

Banning plastic straws won't save the world, but it may make the world a bit safer for all God's creatures. What concerns me much more than the plastic straw ban is the move by a number of states to ban such plastic bans. The Michigan legislature, for instance, recently banned municipalities from adopting plastic bag bans despite a number of communities trying to eliminate plastic waste.

Rolf Bouma is interim pastor at Dearborn Christian Fellowship, Dearborn, Mich., and teaches in the University of Michigan's Program in the Environment in Ann Arbor.



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

Committee to Guide Office of Social Justice Planned

NEWS

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At its October 2018 meeting, the Christian Reformed Church’s Council of Delegates laid the groundwork for a committee to guide and support the CRC’s Office of Social Justice (OSJ). The Council acts on behalf of the CRC’s synod between its annual meetings.

The new committee is a result of a debate at Synod 2018 about the role of OSJ and whether it was venturing beyond its mandate of Christian advocacy to actual lobbying by calling on church members to support specific legislation.

Synod decided to create a committee modeled on the Canadian Committee for Contact with the Government, which for 50 years has provided guidance and support for OSJ’s counterpart in Canada, the Centre for Public Dialogue. Synod left implementation of the assignment to the Council.

The mandate of the new committee is to guide and support OSJ in addressing U.S. governments on pressing issues of the day “from an integrally biblical, theological, and confessional perspective . . . emphasizing whenever possible the official positions of the CRCNA as adopted by synod.”

The new committee will meet twice a year. As is the case for the Centre for Public Dialogue, which reports to the Council’s Canada Corp., the new committee will present an annual plan detailing the work of OSJ in addressing public policy, to be approved by the Council’s U.S. corporation.

The committee will include eight members, with at least one representative from each of the four U.S. regions. The Council said membership must also “primarily consist of persons with expertise in, affected by, and/or lived experience with the primary justice issues that the OSJ addresses,” such as poverty/hunger, creation care/climate

change, immigration/refugees, religious persecution, or abortion.

Tyler Wagenmaker, Classis Zeeland, wanted the committee membership to also reflect the ideological diversity in the CRC’s American churches. Delegates refused to specify that.

Bruce DeKam, Northern Michigan, opposed the mandate. He said the understanding at synod was that this committee was a compromise to try to see things from both sides of the aisle, to “temper OSJ, not cause more division. I’d like that mandate to be rewritten totally.”

Gary Bos, Classis Columbia, said that this committee “would at least provide a group that OSJ could bounce [ideas] off before going public.”

The members of the committee will initially be recommended by the Council’s nominating services committee in consultation with OSJ staff. After that, recommendations for membership will be brought by the committee itself for approval by the Council.

The Council adopted the mandate and membership. DeKam, Wagenmaker, Brian Oschner (Central Plains), and Ralph Wigboldus (Huron) registered their negative votes.

—Gayla R. Postma

Council Works on Assignments from Synod 2018

One of the duties of the Council of Delegates is to carry out the tasks assigned to it by synod, the annual assembly of the Christian Reformed Church. Synod 2018 gave the Council plenty to do.

[✓] Synod 2018 recognized how conflict hurts the church and urged the executive director to issue a purposeful and consistent call to the entire denomination to be intentional in prayer for reconciled relationships. It also asked that a list of existing resources addressing unresolved conflict and the need for reconciliation be compiled. That list was published in October on The Network. See tinyurl.com/NetworkReconciliation.

[✓] Synod asked the Council to clarify the expectations for funding of Reformed curricula in the future. The Council approved an addition to the Faith Formation Ministries' mandate to include supporting children's ministry in Christian Reformed congregations by regularly refreshing existing Faith Alive curricula; providing training, support, and consultations for teachers and

directors; and providing guidance for assessing and adapting other (non-Faith Alive) curricular materials. Colin Watson, director of ministries and administration for the CRC, noted that the focus is on existing resources, not developing completely new materials. The approval of the mandate addition includes a note specifying that "the denomination commits to include the need for these resources in upcoming budget processes and request the appropriate financial resources required to carry out this mandate."

[✓] Synod 2018 held a lengthy discussion confronting the issue of abuse in the church. Synod instructed the Council to appoint a small team to bring recommendations to Synod 2019 regarding how the CRCNA can best address the patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination.

The Council appointed Rev. Carel Geleynse, Kathy Vandergrift, Sherry Fakkema, Heather Garretson, Patricia Van Reenen, and Elsa Fennema to that team, requesting that the team find

two or three additional nominees from the multicultural communities of the CRC. The committee will also include Rev. Darren Roorda (Canadian ministries director), Bonnie Nicholas (director of the CRC's Safe Church ministry), and Susan Hoekema, a member of the Council of Delegates.

[] In the absence of a standing synodical committee to review Bible translations suitable for worship, Synod 2018 requested the Council advise how a future synod can address its responsibility for that review. The Council asked the executive director to establish an *ad hoc* committee to advise the Council on this assignment and said that the committee should include a member of the CRC's senior leadership; the director of CRC Worship Ministries and/or the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship; a current or retired professor from Calvin Theological Seminary with experience in Bible translations; a current professor of Old or New Testament; and pastors.

—Gayla R. Postma

Young CRC Member Visits Parliament as Diabetes Delegate

The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation sent 28 delegates to Ottawa, Canada, for its Kids for a Cure Lobby Day in October. Maya Webster, 7 years old and a member of Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont., was among them.

Maya, a student at Beacon Christian School, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when she was 2 years old. She's an active advocate for awareness of Type 1 diabetes at her school and in her community. Maya said she thinks she was selected to be part of this delegate team because she's "smart, sassy, and brave."

— Krista Dam-VandeKuyt



Maya Webster with Canada's Minister of Health Ginette Petitpas Taylor.

Photo by Christi Webster

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Noteworthy



Ray Vander Kooij receives a lantern symbolizing the “light of joy” he is in the community.

Rev. Ray Vander Kooij, pastor of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Acton, Ont., was named **2018 Citizen of the Year** in Acton. Honored at a dinner on Oct. 16, Vander Kooij was told the work he does as chair of the community’s Housing Taskforce, serving on the Youth Services Network and with the Acton Ministerial Association make him a “light of joy” in the community.



Mark Stephenson with his wife, Bev, at Ability Award dinner, Oct. 29.

Mark Stephenson, director of Disability Concerns for the CRC, was recognized with **Disability Network Lakeshore’s Ability Award** in Holland, Mich. The award annually recognizes individuals making progress in the advancement of creating inclusive communities.

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Reimagining Ministry Shares

Anyone paying attention to the budget of their Christian Reformed congregation knows that a substantial expense listed is ministry shares. That is the amount churches send to their local classis (regional group of churches) and to the denomination to pay for ministries the churches have together agreed to support.

Once called quotas and later renamed ministry shares, this system of collecting money from local congregations has been around for at least 100 years. Numerous reports over the decades have shown that it is the most efficient way to collect funds for shared ministry. John Bolt, the denomination’s director of finance and operations, said it takes \$0.20 for every \$100 collected in ministry shares. The additional amount needed to meet the budget takes \$20 per \$100 to raise.

However, many churches don’t pay all or any of their ministry shares. For fiscal year 2019, the ministry shares amount for adult professing members is set at \$346.48. According to Bolt, if everyone paid their full share, the denomination would receive around \$38 million for shared ministry. In 2017, \$22.7 million was collected, about 60 percent of the amount requested.

Making up a budget of millions based on hoped-for receipts is operating “on a wish and a prayer,” according to Bolt.

In 2016, delegates at synod, the annual leadership meeting of the CRC, asked the church’s administration to “reimagine”

the ministry shares system. At the October 2018 meeting of the CRC’s Council of Delegates (which handles the business of the church between synods), delegates received the result of that study.

Under the current system, a denominational budget is drafted by staff, the annual synod approves a ministry shares amount, and a letter goes to the churches notifying them of that amount. The Reimagining Ministry Shares report proposes reversing that process by starting with what the churches pledge toward shared ministry and then creating a budget based on that.

Under the new proposal, local church councils would be asked to consider their response to the ministry shares request for the following fiscal year. Then each classis would be instructed to take the time during fall meetings to “determine the best way to maximize the pledged support for denominational ministry.” That pledged support would be reported to the denominational offices by February 1 of the following year; denominational budgets could then be drafted based on pledged income.

According to Bolt, this would align ministry shares commitment to the budget it supports and put churches at the beginning of the process. It also gets the classes more involved, he said. “Few classes have [this] conversation. That kind of conversation is important to have at every classis.”

Christopher DeWinter, Classis Niagara, said, “I’m not sure if what I see here is addressing the issue. We need to reimagine ministry. We need to wonder together, What does it mean to do mission?”

"The Church Order lays out how we do mission," Bolt responded. "We have to do it together." He said it doesn't matter if the church is sending out a missionary for 30 years or teaching locals to become pastors. The question is still, How are you going to pay for it?

Some delegates were in favor of the proposal. Brian L. Ochsner of Classis Central Plains said, "Our classis just went into the same model about three years, aligning pledge budgets and spending."

Bruce DeKam, Classis Northern Michigan, agreed. "As a business owner, I understand the necessity of having budgets that line up. It makes a tremendous amount of sense."

One of the stumbling blocks for several delegates was moving the budget from the calendar year to the church's fiscal year (July 1-June 30).

DeWinter said it seems to work against the posture of letting local churches set the course. "We're asking our local churches to adjust to the denominational schedule. Most churches operate on a calendar year." Aaltje van Grootheest, at-large delegate, agreed. "Why do you want us to adjust our budget process? Why don't you adjust to us?"

Other delegates wondered how the new system will work for classes that meet only two times per year.

CRC executive director Steven Timmermans told delegates that the main shift is letting the local church and then the classis take the lead in making the commitment to ministry shares. "If we do that, we do need some logistical rearranging to do it in an orderly way. The system we have is top down. The posture shift is away from that."

Sam Sutter, Classis Atlantic Northeast, was in favor of the report but was concerned about execution. "I want us to be very intentional sharing the vision with local churches."

The Council agreed to propose the changes to Synod 2019 but with a one-year delay. If adopted, churches and classes would be asked to discuss their ministry shares contributions in the fall of 2020, reporting pledged support to denominational offices by Feb. 1, 2021, for the budget year starting July 1, 2021.

In an interview after the meeting, Bolt said, "We hope the churches in fact feel more empowered by making the pledge and therefore respond at a higher level to the suggested ministry shares." If they don't, he said they would have to think about reducing programs. "Churches through synod tell us what ministry they want to do. If the money drops, you can make some of it up through individual donor gifts, but in reality, what the churches fund is really what they are passionate about doing," he said. "What gets cut is the hard question."

—Gayla R. Postma

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Walter DeRuiter

1937-2018

Mechanic, pastor, poet, and prayer warrior Walt DeRuiter lived his life according to Micah 6:8 and was "always thankful." He died on Sept. 15 at age 81.

In his youth, DeRuiter worked as a farm laborer in Strathroy, Ont. Later, he completed an automobile apprenticeship program, purchased a garage, and began a successful career as a mechanic.

The DeRuiters were blessed with five children. A son died from childhood leukemia; ten years later, a daughter died in a car accident. After her death, the couple moved to Grand Rapids to attend Reformed Bible College, graduating together on their 25th wedding anniversary. Following an additional year at Calvin Theological Seminary, DeRuiter served three CRC churches in Ontario: Williamsburg, Hanover, and Collingwood.

Retiring to Strathroy in 2000, DeRuiter continued serving as interim preacher. He sang with the Barbershop Singers and enjoyed weekly coffee meetings with a group of male friends. A highlight was being a volunteer chaplain from 2009 to 2016 with Holland America Cruise Lines.

DeRuiter will be missed by Lydia, his wife of 58 years; their three children and spouses; six grandchildren; and one great-grandson. He was predeceased by son Dickie in 1971 and daughter Carol in 1981.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Alberta Church Continues 20-Year Tradition of 'Cowboy Christmas'

Every December, just west of Edmonton in the town of Stony Plain, Alta., Hope Christian Reformed Church stages "Cowboy Christmas," a fundraising concert that has featured country music legends and emerging artists for more than 20 years. It's also an annual opportunity

to share the Christmas story.

"The event really points people to Jesus with the message of Christ's birth front and center," explained Rev. Jacob Boer, pastor of Hope CRC.



Photo by Bob Block

Country Musician Stewart MacDougall has been a regular performer at Cowboy Christmas for the past 20 years.

Country music producers John and Carmen Lindsay, members of Hope CRC, started this event

with former pastor Russell Graff to raise funds for the maintenance of the historic 1912 church on their current church property. Carmen Lindsay, a cowboy poet, singer, and songwriter also performs each year.

In recent years, now that the 1912 clapboard church is under the care of a historical society, funds raised through a goodwill offering are split between two area charities, Stony Plain Kinsmen for their Christmas hamper program and Hope Mission in Edmonton, to fund Christmas dinners for those who use the shelter.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Alberta Town Welcomes More Than 200 for Christmas Dinner

For more than 20 years, the folks of Lacombe, Alta., have had the opportunity to attend a free community dinner on Christmas Day. Bethel Christian Reformed Church has spearheaded the event for going on 11 years.

"This event is about having dinner with your neighbors," said Cora Hoekstra, who has helped run the annual dinner along with her husband, Pete, for many years running. "Nobody should analyze why they're there, other than they desire to enjoy a traditional Christmas dinner with others. From folks who are only one or two people at Christmas to [those from] a few group homes who serve differently abled individuals [all] enjoy dinner with us on Christmas Day. It's really a wonderful event."

Attracting about 275 people in 2017, the event relies on resources from the whole community in addition to Bethel CRC. Lacombe Memorial Centre, located downtown, is the only local venue large



enough to hold the event. Normally not open on statutory holidays, the staff graciously provides space for the free dinner every year. Dozens of volunteers from other Lacombe churches and various neighbors band together to prepare and serve the food.

Hoekstra said she enjoys having young adults volunteer to serve the meal. In 2017 Bethel's GEMS club, a weekly faith formation group for girls, made 200 ornaments to give as a gift to everyone who attended.

—Krista dela Rosa

Welcoming the Neighbors to Christmas Celebrations

Members of The River Church, a Christian Reformed congregation in Allegan, Mich., are a few years into a church renewal process begun with training through Calvin Theological Seminary's Church Renewal Lab in 2015. Part of that journey has included wrapping their wider community into the church's yearly celebrations of Christmas.

In 2016, the re-emerging congregation pulled off the first of these new experiences, welcoming the church's neighbors to experience the story of Jesus' birth in a "Journey to Bethlehem" with four walk-through scenes.

"The goal was to plan an open house event that would be a team effort by our congregation and church renewal team and that would be a gift to the Allegan community," said Kathy Estelle, volunteer worship planner and main organizer of the first event.

This year the church is offering "The Gift of Christmas," again during the fourth week of Advent. The church's pastor, Rev. James Dykstra, plans to present a monologue as Joseph in a rustic carpenter's shop. As in 2016, another room will have narration of the nativity story.

—Alissa Vernon

A Chorus of Community in California

A caroling Christmas hayride, designed to bring music to people who are homebound or have difficulty getting out, has become a three-year tradition for Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Ripon, Calif. In 2016, hoping for 25 participants, the staff assembled two trailers with hay bales for seating. They were happily surprised with more than 50 eager carolers.

Immanuel found a third trailer for 2017, exceeding expectations again with 80 participants. In the caroling hayride's second year, each trailer took its own hour-long route—one focused nearly entirely on Bethany Home, the community's residence for seniors. The hay bales were packed with everyone from infants to 80-year-olds. Neighborhood girls who participate in the church's GEMS club and their parents joined congregants in the festivities. After caroling, the church offered a social gathering including hot cider and *oiebollen*, the Dutch treat of fried dough and sprinkled sugar.

Melissa Viss, the church's worship director, spearheads the event. Ten to 15 other volunteers drive, navigate, lend trailers, and coordinate the social activities. Viss considers the event "an alternative worship service" and plans mostly sacred carols, though a chorus of "Jingle Bells" may be thrown in for good measure. As the choirs are only assembled minutes before boarding the trailers, there may be a few bumps along the road, but Viss said that their "enthusiasm seems to cover whatever mistakes might happen."

— Elizabeth Drummond



Photo by Brandon Bajerna

Immanuel CRC's 2017 Christmas Hayride.

Prisons and Parishioners: Churches Help Inmates' Families Celebrate Christmas



Christmas is a time usually spent with friends and family. But for those who are separated from loved ones, the holidays can be a source of sadness rather than joy. Especially when that absence comes with feelings of shame and anger. Separation because of distance or death are often acknowledged from the pulpit, but how often are those separated from loved ones because of incarceration considered? Prison Fellowship, an organization ministering to inmates and their families, provides Angel Tree Christmas—an opportunity to care for both the ones behind bars and the families left behind during the holiday season. Some Christian Reformed churches across North America have supported this venture this season and in Christmases past.

Prison Fellowship, founded in 1976, is the largest Christian nonprofit that serves prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families, with a sister organization established in Canada in 1980.

Churches that participate in the yearly Angel Tree campaign are given tags with the names of children who have a parent serving time in prison. Each tag includes a

Gifts ready to be shared at the Mason City Angel Tree Christmas Party, 2017.

child's name, gender, age, and gift suggestions. Inmates can include a note on the tag for the child. Church participants purchase and deliver a gift to the child, either at the child's home or at a central Christmas party.

Rolling Acres CRC in Mason City, Iowa, loves being a part of Angel Tree Christmas, participating since 2009. In 2017, after sponsoring 51 families, they received an emergency call from the regional coordinator and helped another 30 families in a neighboring state.

At Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines, Ont., 2017 was the first Christmas for the Angel Tree program. The congregation is repeating its participation this year.

— Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Cooper
1924-2018

The son of Frisian immigrants, John Cooper grew up in Clifton, N.J., and served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Throughout his life he had an unwavering faith in God's love. He died on Oct. 16 at age 94.

After graduating from Rutgers University and Philadelphia's Westminster Theological Seminary, Cooper was ordained in 1956. He pastored two Reformed (RCUS) churches in North Dakota before serving the following Christian Reformed churches: Forest Community, London, Ont.; Grace, Muskegon, Mich.; East Palmyra, N.Y.; Paramus, N. J.; Bethel, Acton, Ont.; and First, Sarnia, Ont. (as stated supply), where he retired in 1987.

Cooper's special gift in ministry was his ability to connect with those who were emotionally wounded; alienated from family, church, or society; addicted; incarcerated; or victims of abuse or discrimination. He is remembered as an engaging preacher and teacher. Cooper was also talented at mechanical and technical things. He designed and led construction of the church building in Forest, Ont.

Cooper is lovingly remembered by his sons John, Justin, Jeffrey, Joel, and their wives; 10 grandchildren and spouses; and eight great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by Beatrice, his wife of 53 years, and by daughter-in-law Elizabeth.

— Janet A. Greidanus

Church Worldwide: Eugene Peterson, Pastor and Author of *The Message*, Remembered

Eugene Peterson, best-selling author of *The Message* and longtime pastor praised as a "shepherd's shepherd," passed away Oct. 22 at age 85.

Among Peterson's last words were, "Let's go," according to a statement from his family.

Peterson pastored Christ Our King Presbyterian Church, a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation he founded in Bel Air, Md., for 30 years while also writing widely to encourage and develop other pastors.

He is best known for *The Message*, his popular paraphrase of the Bible in contemporary language that made the Bible accessible to many Christians. Altogether, he wrote more than 30 books, including his 2011 memoir, *The Pastor*, and the Christian classic *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

"Eugene Peterson has encouraged, formed, and often literally saved the ministry of more than one pastor over the years through his writing and thinking (I would include myself in that list)," wrote Truett Seminary professor Robert Creech in an Oct. 13 Facebook post.

"He has refreshed Scripture for many through his thoughtful paraphrase of the

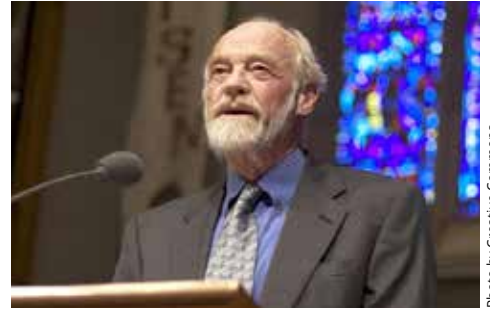


Photo by Creative Commons

Eugene Peterson lectures at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle in May 2009.

Bible published as *The Message*. He has taught us to pray."

The family statement on the date of his death said Peterson remained joyful and smiling in his final days.

"It feels fitting that his death came on a Monday, the day of the week he always honored as a Sabbath during his years as a pastor. After a lifetime of faithful service to the church—running the race with gusto—it is reassuring to know that Eugene has now entered into the fullness of the kingdom of God and has been embraced by eternal Sabbath," the statement read.

— Religion News Service

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Recent Statements from CRC Leadership

On Oct. 17, the United Nations' International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, Canadian ministry leaders in the Christian Reformed Church issued a statement lamenting "poverty and injustice as corporate moral wounds" and affirmed "the urgency of systemic and prophetic responses" to poverty.

On Oct. 30, three days after a mass shooting that killed 11 people at a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pa., the Christian Reformed Church released a statement expressing words of mourning, lament, commitment, and resolve.

Find more details and links to the statements under these headlines at thebanner.org:

- » Statement from Canadian Leaders in the CRC Affirms Poverty Eradication Efforts
- » CRCNA Statement Following Pittsburgh Shooting

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Beyond Giving Fish: Creating Sustainable Change through the Christian Reformed Church

by Adele Konyndyk, World Renew

If you are involved in responding to poverty or have ever thought about the best way to help others, you've probably heard the expression, "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime."

This common proverb is often used to explain that the best way to help others is not to provide a one-time handout but to equip them with skills they can use for the long term.

Recently, late-night talk show host and author Trevor Noah offered another take on this axiom. In *Born A Crime*, Noah's recent best-selling memoir of his South African childhood, he said, "People love to say [that phrase]. What they don't say is, 'And it would be nice if you gave him a fishing rod.' That's the part of the analogy that's missing."

In other words, sustainable change and lasting transformation are complicated to achieve. They require going beyond short-term solutions or simple formulas. Sometimes they involve training; sometimes they also involve the distribution of supplies or tackling existing systems within communities.

Several agencies of the Christian Reformed Church in North America work with vulnerable people around the world. Through their work, God's children are finding new ways to challenge the very systems that prevent people from flourishing and working together to bring about positive change that lasts.

It Takes a Network to Sustain a Church Plant

Jeff Heerspink is a pastor of F Street Neighborhood Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. He has learned that providing financial resources is only part of the complex equation involved in creating sustainability in ministry.

"I'm not the guy who goes to a conference and says, 'Oh, I found the secret formula to saving our church,'" Heerspink says.

Located in the urban core of Lincoln, F Street Neighborhood Church is one of two Christian Reformed church plants in Classis Heartland. It operates differently from the established churches in the region and faces unique challenges, particularly in terms of sustainability.

"It's a really impoverished area," Heerspink says about the neighborhood where the church is located. "It's 95 percent

Jeff Heerspink with members and leaders of F Street Church.

rental housing. Most people are either young college students or older and on a fixed income. There are a lot of drugs, prostitution, [and] addiction."

Heerspink notes that God has provided financially for the church from the very start. A donor bought the church's building for them, and the congregation has received support from Classis Heartland and Resonate Global Mission. But finances are only the first step toward long-term sustainability for the church.

"We as the church have a huge vision that we need to raise people in the neighborhood to be the next ministry leaders," Heerspink says. "I believe they will be mighty warriors for the neighborhood. But as romantic and exciting as that is, that's a long journey with a lot of people who come and go."

To help with the vision, Heerspink participated in Cultivate, a year-long Resonate program that brings together a network of church planters for training and teaching on topics such as leadership development.

As Heerspink notes, however, there is no secret formula for a sustainable congregation. That's why the network of ministry leaders learning—and teaching each other to fish—is key.

"I think sometimes you feel alone [as a church planter]," says Heerspink, "especially when you're a church plant in the middle of a classis of established churches. It's hard to find people who understand you. . . . That's why I think Cultivate is good. It brings you into a peer group of people to process and bounce some ideas off of."

Heerspink participated in Cultivate in 2016, but Cultivate's network is still there for him today. Heerspink has ministry leaders working in similar contexts that he can call when he needs feedback on an idea or feels stuck. They are part of a network of church planters who are constantly learning together.

"We're a church plant with hurting, broken, and complicated people," said Heerspink. "[Having that network] gives us ideas, it gives us encouragement, it gives us hope."

It Takes a Market to Sustain a Livelihood

This idea of God's people working and learning together to bring about lasting change in their own lives also gets World Renew U.S. Executive Director Carol Bremer-Bennett excited.

"Because of broken systems, people are sold—and buy into—lies," she said, pointing out that people in poverty are often persuaded to believe falsehoods about themselves, "like 'you're poor, you'll always be poor' or 'you are alone.'"

World Renew seeks to overcome these false realities and help people change their stories in positive ways for the long term.

Often this work involves programs that tackle multiple aspects of poverty at the same time. Consider James's story.

James lives in Kenya and used to believe that he'd always be poor and alone. He finished high school two years ago, but his family's circumstances made college impossible. Instead, he struggled to make a living as a small-scale farmer.

The hurdles for James included his lack of education and his poor income, but also a lack of access to markets to sell his produce. When James did find a buyer for his crops, he was often competing against other farmers selling the same produce at peak season. This meant low prices for everyone and a sense of hopelessness for James.

"He was really anxious about his future," James's mother said.

World Renew staff worked with James and 16 other young people in his village to explore ways to improve their farming and link them to markets where they could make a fair profit and not be exploited.

The young farmers enthusiastically used what they had learned to improve their livelihoods. James alone planted 1,000 cauliflower plants, 300 cucumber plants, and 300 celery plants. He is very encouraged by his success so far.

By working with a local social enterprise in James's community, World Renew helped James and other local farmers find access to a market with a reasonable price for their harvested produce—a market that will last long after World Renew's work in his community is over.

"If what I have started seeing from our access to this market is sustained," said James, "I know my life will be significantly improved."

"Just the fact that my son is hopeful in life is already an achievement," James's mother said.

It Takes Changing Systems to Sustain a Family

Another example of sustainable change is happening in Tanzania. Oliver, a 34-year-old mother of five, lives in rural Tanzania and is a member of a women's savings group started with the encouragement and training of one of the church partners supported by World Renew.

In Oliver's community, people do not have access to formal banking systems, so it is difficult for them to earn interest on their savings or have access to loans when they want to start or grow a business.

Oliver also faced the hurdle of being a woman in a society where men control household finances.

"I depended on my husband for everything, and all of the burdens were on him," she said. "Because of this there was a lot of conflict in our home, and I thought of ending the marriage."

But World Renew's church partner helped Oliver and her neighbors realize that they had strength in their community and small amounts of money they could use to improve their futures.

Community members were coached to start up a village savings and loan association (VSLA), a communal bank for people to pool small amounts of money to provide each other with loans. Families can then access capital and income from investments that otherwise would be unavailable to them.

When Oliver joined the group, her life and marriage began to change for the better. She was allowed to borrow 400 Kenyan shillings (approximately \$4 USD). She used this loan to buy cassava, which she then sold at the local market. Soon, even after repaying her loan, she had a profit of 300 Kenyan shillings.

Oliver continued to participate in her VSLA, borrowing money, investing it in new livelihood efforts, and making a profit. She and her fellow group members learned the value of working together to save funds.

One day she decided to use some of her savings to buy her husband a gift: a T-shirt. When he came home from work and found it, he smiled with surprise and gratitude.

"Since then, joy and happiness has returned to our family," said Oliver. "My savings also improved because my husband started supporting me as I save. Today, there is no quarrel at home. Decision-making is shared. There is peace here. I feel good, confident, and a productive part of my family."

Oliver and her husband have since bought solar panels and a metal roof for their house. They can afford to pay their children's school fees and have laid a cement foundation for a permanent home. Even more exciting than these developments for their family, however, are the transformational changes that have taken place in their marriage and in Oliver's understanding of her own abilities.

Because the program was offered through a local church partner, Oliver also has been growing in her faith and has a relationship with a church that can nurture her spiritually.

Jeff Heerspink, James, and Oliver are all examples of sustainable change taking more than just giving someone a fish. It even takes more than teaching someone to fish. Instead, creating sustainable change takes faith in the transformative power of Christ, the "fisher of people." Through local church partners and Christian Reformed ministries, people are learning to see themselves as image bearers of God, capable of shifting systems and changing their lives and communities for the better. This is what sustainable change is all about. 

Program Fosters Financial Shalom for Pastors and Churches

IN FEBRUARY 2017, the Christian Reformed Church in North America launched a new initiative, the Financial Shalom Project, to support and sustain pastors for ministry. The project was designed to meet the needs of a growing number of pastors who reported that debt and stress about finances were interfering with their ability to do ministry. In response to this need, Financial Shalom provides grants and financial stewardship training to pastors facing a variety of financial challenges.

To date, Financial Shalom has already helped more than 60 pastors and their families with grants for student loans, Christian school tuition, medical bills, mortgage payments, immigration fees, and credit card debt.

“Our support grants have brought immediate financial relief for many pastors and their families,” said Holly Small, Financial Shalom’s project manager. “But the sustaining piece of the project equips pastors for the journey ahead by also strengthening their financial knowledge.”

To do this, Financial Shalom provides complimentary financial management courses and personal financial consultation to all grant recipients and to any pastor, regardless of their financial situation. It also equips churches with healthy stewardship practices through programs led by Barnabas Foundation in the United States and Christian Stewardship Services in Canada. These educational resources are intended and available for all pastors and churches.

When Cody Zuiderveen became an ordained CRCNA minister and was commissioned as a missionary with Resonate Global Mission, he knew his

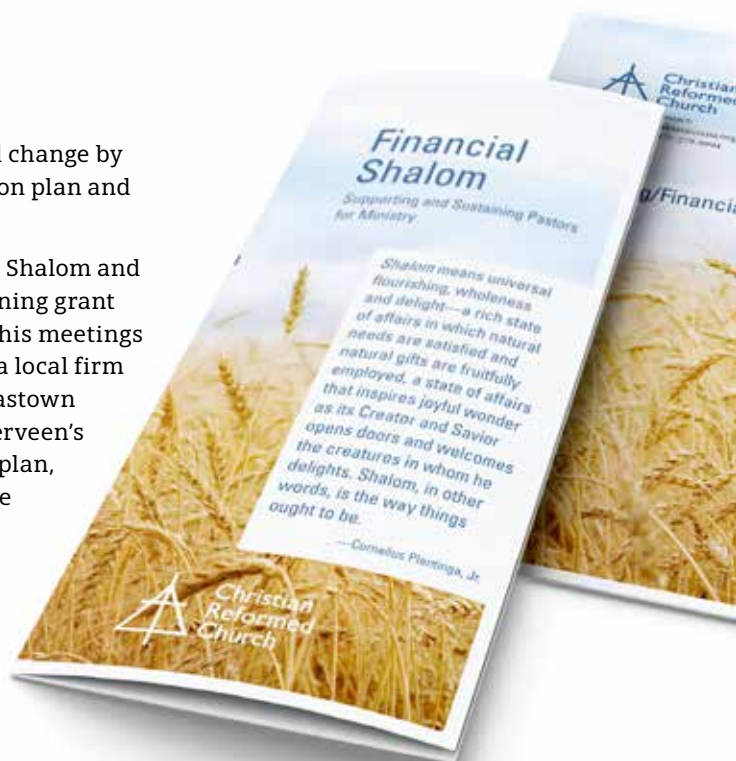
financial situation would change by becoming part of a pension plan and earning foreign income.

Cody contacted Financial Shalom and received a financial planning grant that covered the costs of his meetings with Easttown Financial, a local firm in Grand Rapids, Mich. Easttown Financial reviewed Zuiderveen’s income, budget, pension plan, and investments and gave him advice.

“Easttown helped develop small steps that we can take each year to reach our financial goals. . . . With their guidance, we were able to identify our savings sweet spot and design obtainable habits that will help us arrive there in the years to come,” Zuiderveen said.

Northside Community Church in Paterson, New Jersey, is another example. This past summer, the congregation had two church groups use Financial Shalom resources. Partnering with Crown Financial, Financial Shalom offered the church’s teen and young adult leadership and mentoring ministry a course specifically designed for young people, called *God’s Way of Handling Money*.

The group of 10 young people met three times a week for one month to discuss the financial principles learned in the study. Reverend Sheila Holmes, pastor of Northside Community, said the study “was an eye opener for our young adults to see how much the Bible refers to the use of money and how much God cares for them. It encouraged them to be more attentive and responsible with their money. We had two teens who opened



a saving account with the money they earned for the summer.”

Additionally, 10 adults at Northside Community Church participated in Crown’s *MoneyLife Personal Finance* study, in which they discussed saving, investing, and stewardship principles. One participant expressed amazement at how belief affects money management behavior. The curriculum sparked such an interest in the church that the class was offered again this fall.

This *MoneyLife Personal Finance* study is available in English and in Spanish and can be freely accessed by all CRC pastors and churches. Please contact shalom@crcna.org if you, your church, or your church’s youth group is interested in participating in this study.

—Holly Small, Financial Shalom Project

The View from Here

What My Christmas Tree Teaches Me

IT'S THAT TIME of year again when many of our homes and even some of our churches are decked out with lights, garland, ribbons, and—of course—Christmas trees. While originally borrowed from pagan traditions, the Christmas tree has become a central component of many of our Christian Advent traditions. As I think about setting up the Christmas tree in my own home, a few other tree-related thoughts come to mind.

The first was sparked more than five years ago when Ron Vanderwell penned a devotional entitled “Sustaining Faith” for the Back to God Ministries International publication *Today*. Based on Psalm 1, the devotional focused on the image of a tree planted by streams of water. The third verse of that psalm explains that a person who loves God’s law “is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.”

Vanderwell closed his reflection with these words: “Psalm 1 assures us God wants to sustain us in a way like that, if we only will let him. We can call this sustaining faith, and it’s here that we really begin to see God’s hand in our lives.”

As we journey through Advent all the way to Christmas morning, we celebrate a God whose love became incarnate in a manger 2,000 years ago and who continues to sustain us today as a stream sustains a tree. That is something beautiful to remember.

My second tree-related thought has to do with Jesus’ family tree as described in the first chapter of Matthew. Just as the psalmist’s tree reminds us of God’s sustaining hand, this family

tree describing Jesus’ lineage reminds us of our covenant-keeping God who made a promise to Adam and to Abraham and who fulfilled that promise in a stable in Bethlehem.

Third, as our ears ring with angels proclaiming “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14), we also know that the story that started in Bethlehem leads to a tree—the cross—upon which Jesus was crucified. This tree is a striking contrast to the manger scenes we love, but is part of our promise-keeping God’s plan for us. Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. He also rose again and ascended into heaven.

Last, I think of Romans 11, where we encounter the image of an olive tree. As Christians, we are all branches grafted onto the tree of Christ. Again, it’s part of God’s plan for us, and the joy of being grafted into the olive tree is that now we will bear fruit.

During this time of Advent waiting, Christmas trees, and celebrations, let us keep rejoicing, knowing that God’s plan, made possible through his Son, gives us life everlasting—a promise that sustains us each day and every day, now and through eternity.



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

크리스마스 나무가 알려준 것

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Lo Que Me Enseña mi Árbol de Navidad

과 아브라함과 맺으시고 베들레헴의 구유에서 성취하신 하나님 언약말입니다.

세번째는 “지극히 높은 곳에서는 하나님께 영광이요 땅에서는 하나님이 기뻐하신 사람들 중에 평화로다 하니라”라는 (누가복음 2:14) 천사들의 선포가 귓가에 울려 퍼질 때 우리는 베들레헴에서 시작된 이야기가 나무, 즉 예수님이 못 박히신 십자가로 이어진다는 것을 또한 알 수 있습니다. 이 나무는 우리가 사랑하는 말구유 장면과 극명한 대조를 이루면서도 이 또한 우리를 위해 약속을 지키시는 하나님의 계획 가운데에 있습니다. 예수님은 십자가에 못 박히셨고, 죽으셨고, 땅에 묻히셨습니다. 그는 또한 다시 죽음에서 일어나셨고, 하늘로 올라가셨습니다.

마지막으로 저는 감람나무를 만나는 로마서 11장을 생각해봅니다. 기독교인으로서는 우리는 모두 그리스도라는 나무에 접붙여진 가지입니다. 다시, 이것은 우리를 위하신 하나님의 계획의 일부이며 감람나무에 접붙여졌기 때문에 우리에게는 이제 열매를 맺을 것이라는 기쁨이 있습니다.

강림절과 크리스마스 트리, 성탄을 축하하는 계절에 우리는 그 아들을 통해서 영생을 주시는 하나님의 계획과 날마다, 지금부터 영원까지 우리를 지속시키신다는 하나님의 약속을 항상 기뻐합니다.

LLEGÓ DE NUEVO esa época del año cuando muchos de nuestros hogares e incluso algunas de nuestras iglesias están adornadas con luces, guirnaldas, listones y—por supuesto—árboles de Navidad. Aunque originalmente tomado de tradiciones paganas, el árbol de Navidad se ha convertido en un componente central de muchas de nuestras tradiciones Cristianas de Adviento. Mientras pienso en colocar el árbol de Navidad en mi propia casa, me vienen a la mente algunas otras reflexiones relacionadas con los árboles.

La primera reflexión surgió hace más de cinco años cuando Ron Vanderwell escribió un devocional titulado “Fe Sustentadora” para la publicación Today de Back to God Ministries International. Basado en el Salmo 1, el devocional se enfocó en la imagen de un árbol plantado junto a la orilla de un río. El tercer verso de ese salmo explica que una persona que ama la ley de Dios “es como el árbol plantado a la orilla de un río que, cuando llega su tiempo, da fruto y sus hojas jamás se marchitan. ¡Todo cuanto hace prospera!”

Vanderwell concluye su reflexión con estas palabras: “El Salmo 1 nos asegura que Dios quiere sostenernos de esta manera, si tan solo se lo permitimos. Podemos llamar a esto una fe sustentadora, y es aquí donde realmente comenzamos a ver la mano de Dios en nuestras vidas.”

Mientras transitamos el tiempo de Adviento hacia la mañana de Navidad, celebramos a un Dios cuyo amor se encarnó en un pesebre hace 2,000 años y quien continúa sosteniéndonos hoy como un río sostiene a un árbol. Esto es algo hermoso para recordar.

Mi segunda reflexión relacionada a un árbol tiene que ver con el árbol genealógico de Jesús descrito en el primer capítulo de Mateo. Así como el árbol del salmista nos recuerda la mano sustentadora de Dios, este árbol genealógico que describe el linaje de Jesús nos recuerda a nuestro Dios quien guarda sus pactos, quien hizo una promesa a Adán y a Abraham y la cumplió en un establo de Belén.

Tercero, así cuando nuestros oídos resuenan con la proclamación de los ángeles “Gloria a Dios en las alturas, y en la tierra paz a los que gozan de su buena voluntad” (Lucas 2:14), también sabemos que esa historia que comenzó en Belén, es la historia que conduce al madero de un árbol—la cruz—en la cual Jesús fue crucificado. Este madero es un contraste impactante a la escena del pesebre que tanto nos gusta, pero es parte del plan para nosotros de nuestro Dios quien cumple sus promesas. Jesús fue crucificado, murió, y fue sepultado. Él también resucitó y ascendió al cielo.

Por último, pienso en Romanos 11, donde nos encontramos la imagen de un árbol, el olivo. Como cristianos, todos somos ramas injertadas en el árbol de Cristo. Una vez más, es parte del plan de Dios para nosotros, y el gozo de estar injertados al olivo es que ahora daremos fruto.

Durante este tiempo de espera del Adviento, árboles de Navidad y celebraciones, continuemos regocijándonos sabiendo que el plan de Dios, hecho posible a través de su Hijo, nos da vida eterna—una promesa que nos sostiene día con día, ahora y por la eternidad.

A God Who Loves Our Language

MOUSSA, A FORMER MUSLIM from West Africa who is now a church planter in Brazil, knows firsthand the importance of reaching people in their heart language. “With many West African refugees here in Brazil,” Moussa said, “we’re challenged to minister in Arabic, a language that is very special for them—for us.”

To meet this challenge, Moussa worked with Luz Para o Caminho (Light for the Way), the Portuguese outreach of Back to God Ministries International.

Luz Para o Caminho (LPC) produces *Cada Dia*, a monthly booklet of daily devotionals. While *Cada Dia* is written for Spanish and Portuguese speakers, LPC found a local church to sponsor its translation into Arabic.

Long-term ministry success requires local ownership. This Arabic translation demonstrates such ownership through BTGMI’s partners in the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB). While BTGMI covers the cost of producing the Portuguese *Cada Dia* materials, IPB members developed the vision and ultimately raised the funds locally for translating the devotional.

Moussa found the booklet’s title, “Good News for Your Family,” to be especially effective. “When I asked people, ‘Did you know that I have good news for your family?’, the question quickly raised curiosity because these refugees receive only bad news.”

Moussa added that the translated devotionals send a very clear message of acceptance: “[The booklets] say there is a God who is close to us; there is a God who loves our language, a God who speaks our language, a God who respects us, a God who accepts our diversity.”

From these simple messages, Moussa began having deeper conversations about the Christian faith with some of the readers, many of whom attend his church plant. One man wanted more copies to take with him when he returned to his home country.

“Thank you very much, for you who support this work, for you who pray for this work, for the initiative, for saying that the work is worth it,” Moussa said.

This local translation project occurred while BTGMI’s Arabic ministry was in a time of transition. While BTGMI



didn’t produce any new Arabic materials in 2018, our indigenous partners in Brazil still reached their local Arabic speakers.

Now that BTGMI’s Arabic ministry has relaunched in Egypt, we are excited to see how God will use our local partners to more effectively reach Arabic speakers there as well.

—Brian Clark, Back to God Ministries International

Calvin Seminary Helps High School Students Uncover Their Future

CHOOSING A SCHOOL, major, or career can be overwhelming for many high schoolers. But what if this process was full of delightful anticipation about the good things in store for us? What if, instead of asking students about a major, we asked them: When do you feel the most alive? What do you love? What injustices do you want to correct? Where do you want to make a difference? What gifts are you the most excited about developing as an adult?

Since 1999, Calvin Seminary has faithfully asked high school students these questions and more. During its youth theology program called Dig (formerly Facing Your Future), the seminary helps students uncover their futures by giving students tools for discerning God's call in their lives.

Every summer for three weeks, Calvin Seminary faculty, students, and staff invest in Dig students through teaching, mentoring, and encouragement, helping students as they explore their gifts and potential callings from a distinctly Christian point of view. Conversations about the future start from a place of confidence in God's sovereignty and gifting. Students can take comfort in knowing that God has divinely gifted each of them and that sometimes people are called to unexpected places.

The general call for Christians to be citizens in God's kingdom is clear. But the specifics get more complex. Students wonder about questions such as: If I am called to evangelism, what does this look like? When I see entrenched social problems—racism, poverty, sex trafficking—how should I respond? How can I best use my gifts to live a life of meaning and purpose?

What are my gifts? What do I do when I am overwhelmed by the pain and troubles of the world? Through these questions and more, students turn to Scripture and theology to delve into the central question: How am I called to live?

This happens both on campus and through off-campus excursions to meet Christians living out their callings. Many are called to serve in church and pastoral ministry, but a

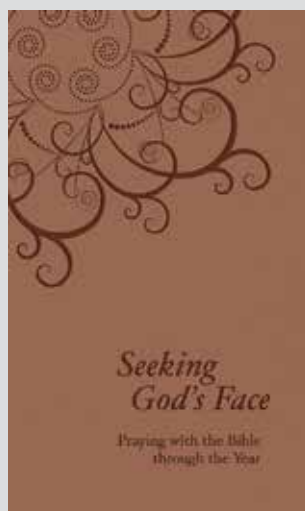
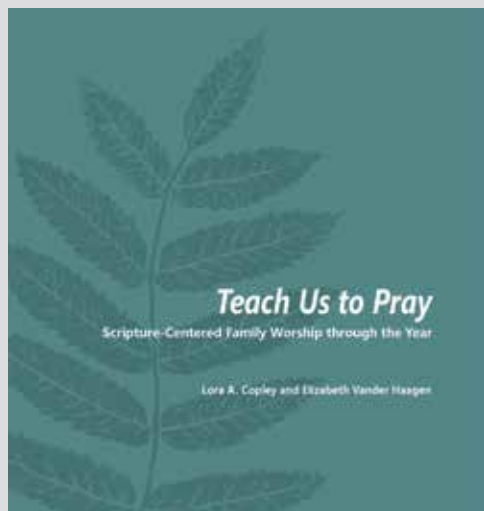
ministry vocation can be pursued in other vocations too.

Over the years, high school students have consistently told us that the weeks they spent at Calvin Seminary changed their perspectives, deepened their faith, and significantly affected their life trajectories and sense of calling. For more information on the program, visit dig.calvinseminary.edu.

—Aaron Einfeld, director of admissions,
Calvin Seminary



Dig students talk with Calvin Seminary professor Sarah Schreiber and drink root beer floats during "Theology on Tap."



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Shepherds and Sheep

SHEPHERDS are people who look after sheep. They provide food and water for their sheep and protect them from predators. Even without predators, sheep can get themselves into trouble. Sometimes a sheep will fall or get knocked over and get stuck on its back. Without a shepherd to help them up, they would die.

We read about many shepherds in the Bible. Rachel, Moses, and David all looked after sheep. But the most important shepherd of all is Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd, and we are his sheep. He leads us and looks after us and gave his life to save us.

Did You Know?

Sheep don't have upper front teeth. Instead they have a thick area of gum called a dental pad. Sheep tear grass by pinching it between this pad and their lower teeth.

A sheep's stomach has four parts. This special stomach allows the sheep to digest the grass and other plants that it eats.

Sheep's eyes have rectangular pupils, so they can see almost all the way around (in front, beside, and behind).

Male sheep are called rams, females are called ewes, and babies are called lambs.

Working Sheep

When you think about sheep, you might think of soft, fleecy wool that gets spun into yarn. But sheep are also raised to provide meat and milk. Feta and Roquefort are just two kinds of cheeses made from sheep's milk.

In vineyards, where grapes are grown, sheep are sometimes used to control weeds—by eating them! They also nibble off the lower leaves of the grape vines, making the grapes easier to harvest.

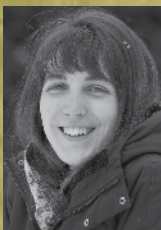


During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson kept a flock of sheep on the lawn of the White House. The sheep kept the grass "mowed," and their wool was sold to raise money for the Red Cross.

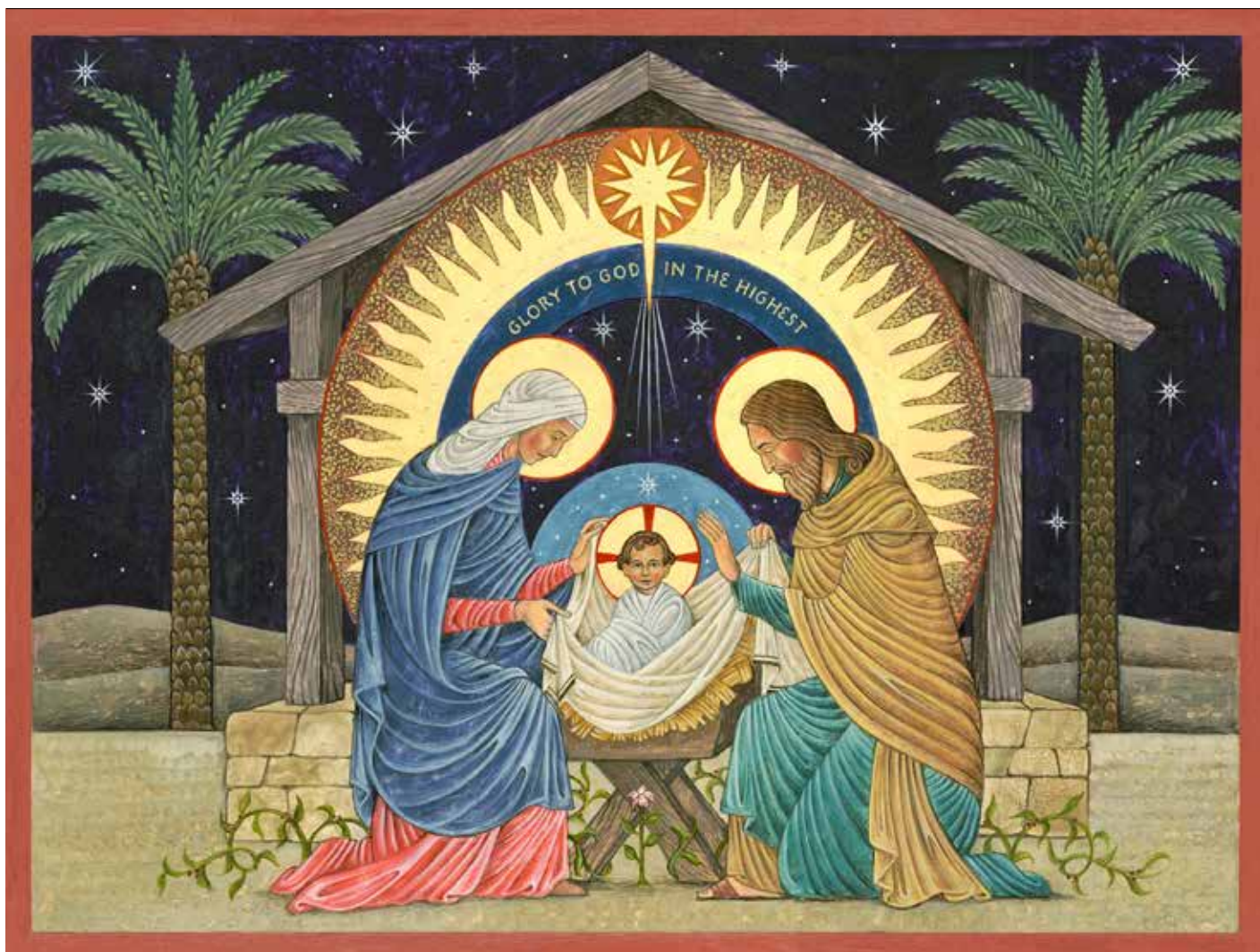
Make a Sheep—or a Whole Flock

With help from an adult, follow these online instructions to make a sheep ornament for your Christmas tree: tinyurl.com/bannersheep.

Make just one or make a whole flock, and remember this Christmas that Jesus came because he cares for us, his sheep. 



Rachel Lancashire is a freelance writer with an educational background in wildlife. She grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and currently attends Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church in Selwyn, Ont.



Beuronese Nativity © 2018 Nicholas Markell / Eyekons

‘Son of David’

Leonard J. Vander Zee

More than anything else, the Bible is a story. It contains other kinds of literature, of course—sermons and poems, letters and proverbs—but mostly it’s a story. There’s one grand, complex, unified story that runs like a backbone from Genesis to Revelation: the story of creation, the fall, redemption, and recreation. N. T. Wright calls it “the true story of the whole world.”

Embedded in that one grand story are hundreds of smaller stories comprising the warp and weft of the great biblical tapestry—stories about floods and famines, mountains and deserts,

war and treachery, tenderness and courage, sex and violence.

But most of all, the Bible’s stories are about God and people. Some of them are about monumental characters who loom larger than life: Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Peter, and Paul. Some of them are about obscure characters like Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives who rescued the Hebrew baby boys from Pharaoh, or Gehazi, Elisha’s wily servant. All these people and all these places are woven into the story about God’s covenant grace.

It’s strange in a way. You would think that God’s revelation to us might

better be communicated by laws and precepts, specific directions on prayer and church polity, and precisely formulated doctrines. But God leaves most of that to us. The literary genre of choice for the Holy Spirit is the story, just as it has always been for parents or poets or preachers, because that’s what life is all about.

Stories are the main way we make sense of our lives. As Eugene Peterson said, “Story isn’t imposed on our lives; it invites us into its life” (*Leap Over a Wall*, 1998). It’s no wonder stories are the main way we also learn about God.

The story of David is the longest single narrative in the whole Bible. It

stretches all the way from 1 Samuel 16, when David is anointed by Samuel, through 1 Kings 2, where he hands the kingdom over to his son Solomon—42 long chapters. We know more about David than about almost any other single person in the whole Bible.

David cuts a dashing figure across Samuel and Kings, but he also casts a long shadow over the entire Bible—not just the Old Testament, but the New as well, where he is mentioned 54 times. Right off the bat, the gospels tell us that Jesus is the Son of David, and that's often what people call him when seeking his help: "Son of David, have mercy on me." The figure of David dominates the Scriptures like no other person but Christ himself.

David is important in Scripture for some good theological reasons. His kingship and his reign in Jerusalem became the biblical model for the kingdom of God. In biblical prophecy, the Messiah must be a descendant of David who will fulfill the promise to David, recorded in 2 Samuel 7, that David's son would sit on David's throne forever. The Messiah would restore the golden age of David's reign. So David and his reign are key biblical and theological concepts.

But that's not the main reason I read and re-read these stories. What draws me back again and again is the man's sheer attractiveness. I like this guy. I find myself rooting for him and identifying with him, suffering with him and weeping with him. He loved life and lived it to the fullest. He never held back.

Even more startling, God liked him—not just loved him, as God loves us all, but *liked* him. Before David is even introduced into the story, God reveals to Samuel that God has rejected Saul and sets Samuel on a search for a "man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). David is attractive not only to us, but to God. What a stunning thought! For all his flaws and sins (and they were monumental),

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there's a certain magnificence to David's humanity.

It's easy to see why. He was a natural leader, and not just because, as the little ditty went, "Saul slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). He knew how to lead men, how to support them and care about them. In his earlier years, fleeing from Saul's murderous wrath, David was the leader of a sort of guerrilla band fighting skirmishes with Saul, living off the land, and hiding out in the wilderness. His men were mostly outlaws and ruffians, yet David turned them from a disorganized gang into a disciplined army. David had the both the skill and charisma of leadership.

One of my favorite David stories takes place after he's led his men on a great victory over the Amalekites. David had force-marched his men to exhaustion. At the Brook Besor, some said they just couldn't go on, so David put them in charge of the baggage and went on to a great victory with the rest of the men.

Returning to the brook, they were all reunited, and David divided the spoils of war. Some of the men who had risked their lives in battle complained that the lazy good-for-nothings who chickened out should get nothing. But

David intervened, telling the men that everything they had was a gift from God, and they would share it with all who were saved by God (1 Sam. 30). A breathtaking example of leadership!

Of course, David the outlaw leader grew into David the king, the commander in chief, and the statesman. He transformed Israel from a loose confederation of tribes into a nation whose territory extended all the way from the Gulf of Aqaba in the south to Syria in the north.

And not only that. For all his natural leadership and political savvy, David was also a poet and a singer. As huge as his public exploits were, he had an equal largeness of soul. Very simply, he loved God. As we hear in the achingly beautiful words of Psalm 23, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want" (NRSV).

The wonderful thing about David's spirituality is its earthiness. Don't forget how he threw royal dignity to the winds and danced half-naked before the Lord as the Israelites brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). Unlike our often pale and limp spirituality, we need to learn from David's vigor, his energy, his wholeheartedness, his broken-hearted grief, and above all, his passionate love for God. He laughed heartily and wept bitterly. It seems he did everything with great passion.

That's not the whole of David's life, of course. Just as he was capable of heroic leadership, daring exploits, and deep spirituality, he was also capable of enormous anger, staggering violence, and grasping lust. He could deliver 400 foreskins of dead Philistines to win Saul's daughter as a wife. He could leer at one of his captain's wives, bed her, arrange the death of her husband, and treat it all with a kind of moral amnesia until God catches up with him.

The story of David is about a man skilled at pulling the levers of political, military, and personal power, with all their built-in ambiguities and

tensions. It's a story about a screwed-up family, ragged marriages, and sibling rivalries. Even so, like God, we can't help but like him.

When I was a kid, my parents gave my brother and me a whole set of books called the Sugar Creek Gang, a sort of Christianized Hardy Boys and the kind of books we were supposed to read on Sunday afternoons. They were all predictable Christian morality tales with cardboard cut-outs of boys my age who didn't think or act like anyone I knew. Moral dilemmas were always drawn in black and white, and the hero always did the right thing—after, of course, having a “word of prayer.”

But at the supper table we read the stories of David from the Bible. To me, David was real, unlike the Sugar Creek boys. He was brave and cunning, cruel and tender. He prayed passionately and sinned monumentally. He was more like me. Here was someone I could relate to.

David's is the story of a life like ours, made up of good and bad. Our job in listening to these stories is not to make them into cookie-cutter morality tales that will then make us into better people. We aren't supposed to shape these stories. We're supposed to let them shape us.

Through them, we gradually see ourselves at our best and our worst, as the flawed and fallible human partners of a holy and loving God who remains tied to us in his covenant embrace. As John Calvin put it, “Let us therefore remember that David is like a mirror, in which God sets before us the continual course of his grace” (*Commentary on Psalms*, Vol. 8).

The key to understanding David's place in the biblical story is that God made an enormous promise to King David. After he was established as king in Jerusalem, God promised through Nathan the prophet that David's throne and his kingdom would last not just a long time, but forever.

That's a staggering promise. The kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed is modeled and built on David's kingdom. God's Son will sit on David's throne and be called “Son of David.” What's going on here?

Think of it this way: David is the most complete, full-blooded, God-intoxicated human being we have in the Bible. Here is a portrait of a real human being who operated as a king in the real world of iron-age Palestine. But he is also deeply enmeshed in an authentic, no-holds-barred, life-and-death relationship with God.

There's an old Yiddish word that wonderfully captures this man: David was a real *mensch*. It's one of those untranslatable words, which is why people use it. A *mensch* is an authentic, likeable, down-to-earth human being—someone you can't help but admire.

You see, David is the best we human beings can do. He's one of the most fully alive human beings that ever lived, a man after God's own heart. Israel wanted a king, and in David they got a real king, a successful king, a king they could all love.

But his life falls apart spiritually, physically, and emotionally, just as our lives do. His family tears itself apart. He almost loses his kingdom to a rebellious son, Absalom. And within a few generations, David's great kingdom begins to crumble. Beginning with this raging river of a man, David's dynasty slows and meanders until it's a stinking swamp of human ineptitude and sin. The best of us, like David, cannot build a kingdom that will last.

And that makes it all the more surprising that David is featured at the heart of the Christmas story. The angel says to Mary, “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will

reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

What happens in the Bethlehem stable is that God in his grace takes the best we can do and makes something of it. In old Bethlehem, where Samuel first laid eyes on that ruddy shepherd boy and poured the oil over his head, a baby was born. He is the Son of David, and he is the Son of God. As the angel says to Mary, “He will save his people from their sins.” David's Son comes to save us all from our David-like sins.

God took the raw material of David's brilliant and sinful humanity—our humanity—and fused it in Mary's womb with his own divine Son to create a new humanity. As John writes near the end of Revelation: “[Christ is] the Root and Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16). In Christ, the Holy Spirit is remaking us into a shining new humanity: righteous and robust, pure and passionate, kingly and kind, just and gentle.

Seeing Jesus as the Son of David reminds us that salvation is much more than having our sins forgiven so we can go to heaven. Salvation means that in Jesus Christ, God is forming a new humanity. Baptized into Jesus Christ, God says to us what he said to his Son as he was baptized by John in the Jordan River: “You are my beloved child, and in you I am well pleased.” We become men and women after God's own heart. 



Leonard J. Vander Zee is a retired pastor; he is a member of Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Mich.

The Heidelberg Catechism, the Church, and You

The Heidelberg Catechism calls the church to a faith that is not only informed but also warm and intensely personal.



Bob Rozema is a retired editor for Faith Alive Christian Resources and author of *HC and Me: The Heidelberg Catechism for Christian Living*. He is a member of Ferrysburg (Mich.) Community Church.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM is the most popular catechism of many that emerged from the Reformation. But it is over 450 years old. Does it still speak to our churches—and to each of us—today? Absolutely.

The catechism connects us to a vital part of our Reformed heritage, with countless believers who have found comfort and joy in its questions and answers and who are part of “a community . . . united in true faith” (Q&A 54). Today it links our minds and hearts with some 20 million Reformed/Presbyterian Christians in more than 40 different language groups.

But beyond honoring our heritage, the catechism abundantly provides us with something we urgently need: comfort—that is, strength and assurance from God. Let’s face it: The nightly news is heavy with reports of school shootings, violence, wars, hurricanes and wildfires, the plight of refugees, and racial division. Our personal lives too are often marred by broken relationships, illnesses, the deaths of loved ones, grief, doubt, guilt, and shame. We need God’s comfort, which shines brightly throughout the catechism beginning with the very first question and answer: “What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own . . .”.

We also need to know what we believe and why, and what difference it makes. These are the precise questions that, according to a recent survey, millennials (people now in their 20s or 30s) *want* churches to answer, according to Calvin College chaplain Mary Hulst. They want substance from their churches as well. That’s good to know because we live in a secular world that, as Calvin education professor Robert Keeley says, “often regards faith as unimportant and

merely a do-good and feel-good spirituality.” There’s a vast tolerance of *any* belief so long as it is sincere.

In this context, the Heidelberg provides clarity and certainty about our basic beliefs by summarizing the central teachings of Scripture as expressed in the Apostles’ Creed, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer. It deepens our knowledge and application of God’s Word.

That’s why it’s crucial for the church to continue to offer fresh, interactive catechism instruction for youth, taught by believers who care about kids. Such a teacher in my home church is Kevin Aardema, who suggests that the catechism helps young people answer or bring up many of the questions they have about their faith. The catechism can also be used in one-on-one mentoring sessions, a process that Hulst says young adults especially value. Instruction in the catechism can also be offered to adult members, inquirers, and new Christians in our churches and on our mission fields.

The Heidelberg calls the church to a faith that is not only informed but also warm and intensely personal. Many of its 129 questions are addressed to *you*, with answers written in *I-me-mine* language. Nothing cold or abstract there! A devotional reading of the catechism will instruct, inspire, and affect how you live from day to day. Because of its warm, pastoral tone and often eloquent language, the catechism is also powerfully effective in worship when cited in sermons or recited by the congregation.

“I am not my own but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.” Now *that’s* powerful comfort. **B**

The 'Heard' Mentality

When it comes
to eternal truths
and life-and-death
questions, the
world doesn't need
"I heard" answers.



Mark Volkers is chair of the communication department at Dordt College and teaches students how to communicate with film and video. He and his wife, Janelle, attend Calvary CRC in Orange City, Iowa.

IN ACTS 17, Paul is basically called a nitwit by his new friends. Here's what happened.

While Paul is waiting for some people, he wanders around Athens and sees a lot of gods. There's even a plaque for some unknown god, giving Paul the hook he's looking for.

He starts talking to folks in the synagogue and the market. He even gets an invite to the Areopagus, perhaps *The View* of his day.

And it's here at the Areopagus that the accusation is leveled, the insult made: the insinuation attacking Paul's intelligence.

Some Epicureans and Stoics (talk about worldviews!) call Paul a babbler: "What is this babbler trying to say?" (v. 18).

The word *σπερμολογος* that we translate as "babbling" refers to a small bird that goes around picking up seeds here and there. It implies a person who doesn't do much original thinking or research, but instead hangs around in the marketplace and snatches bits and pieces of other people's conversations and ideas and passes them along without a lot of critical thought. These are prattling, empty, impertinent people, and the socialites hanging around in the Areopagus weren't exactly paying Paul a compliment. If Buddy the Elf (the main character in the Christmas movie *Elf*) were there, he might have referred to Paul as a "cotton-headed ninny muggins."

It turns out Paul was not a babbling. His knowledge of the Word, the leading of the Spirit, his deep reflection on life, and his ability to think and speak clearly won some people over and caused others to sneer.

But I'm left struggling with the accusation of being a babbling. And I wonder.

I wonder if I'm a babbling. I wonder if my students are babblers.

In a fairly well-known study funded by Microsoft and published in *Time* (May 14, 2015), researchers found that goldfish have an average attention span of nine seconds. The same research found that people will generally lose concentration after eight seconds. That means goldfish can concentrate longer than people can.

Because of this short attention span, we graze continually and rarely stop to chew and digest. I hear it all the time when discussing things with students. "Oh yeah, I heard that . . .". "Did you hear that . . .?" Have you heard . . .? When pressed, it's almost always the case that the student didn't "hear" anything but instead read a headline on a website, overheard an announcer while flipping through channels, or skimmed an email to get the gist and just enough info to form some sort of opinion on the topic *du jour*.

I do it too. As part of my morning devotions, I read the headlines on the BBC app on my phone. During the day, I can say I "heard" that the economy in some country was struggling and the trial of a person in Madagascar wasn't going well. But if pressed, I might not be able to give much more than the headline I skimmed during devotions.

When I was living and working in Kenya, flocks of ibis would often land in the field next to our home near Kisumu. The ibis has a long, narrow beak that allows it to dip into spider burrows in the field and pull out the



juicy arachnids. The ibis walk across the field, dipping, grabbing, swallowing, and rarely sitting still. They are babblers.

Like the Epicureans and Stoics of the day, people today are looking for answers. And those who are willing to give the answers are plentiful. The “spirituality” sections of today’s bookstores are packed, and much of it is laughable. From “name it and claim it” to “cosmic light forces” to “one with the universe” and so much more, it’s a babbler’s smorgasbord.

Paul wasn’t willing to play that game, and we shouldn’t be either.

But breaking away from the “I heard” mentality into the deeper “I know; I’m convinced” mentality will take work.

My dad is 79. We celebrated recently because he now uses Facebook and can keep up with the grandkids. My dad reads differently than his grandkids. Many of the grandkids will read with an earbud in one ear, one eye on the phone to keep up with Snapchat, texts, and so forth, and maybe even have a conversation with someone—all while reading.

My dad never tried to tackle that dizzying array of skills. When he reads, the only noise is the ticking of

the clock on his wall. When he reads something challenging, he will often look up and to his left. He stares blankly for some time as he processes what he just read. Then he goes back and re-reads or continues. Months later, my dad can easily talk about the book in depth and has formed his own opinions on it through reflection. He doesn’t babble about what he “heard.” He talks about what he thinks, based on reflection and thought.

When it comes to eternal truths and life-and-death questions, the world doesn’t need “I heard” answers. It needs straight talk based on conviction, inspiration, reflection, faith, thought, and conviction. None of that happens through grazing. That can only happen as we stop and meditate, contemplate, reflect, and study. Prattling, empty, impertinent people are not good witnesses to the eternal implications of what’s at stake. Biblical illiteracy and an “I heard” frame of mind will not win converts and disciple new believers. Deep understanding of God’s Word and a willingness to engage culture at a deep level will win an audience.

Edward Bernays was active in the early days of public relations in America. He did much to shape opinion, sell

products, and help politicians get what they wanted. With a deep understanding of how it worked, Bernays said, “We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.”

Today this is truer than ever, especially for those of us who get our information from grazing. Information floods our Facebook pages, and the news we get depends completely on which network we watch. In the era of “fake news,” it’s never been easier to be a babbler. And it’s never been easier to get it wrong.

Paul—perhaps remembering the accusation from Athens—wrote to the Romans to encourage them not to conform to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Babblers will struggle with that kind of transformation. Renewal—and the robust conversations that come with renewed minds—will take a commitment to disciplined study and thought. With some focus, we *can* move away from the “heard” mentality. **B**

Watching and Waiting

THE SEASON OF ADVENT is tonally dulled, a time characterized more by patience, waiting, and perseverance than by the kinds of climactic action scenes we see in most Hollywood movies. With that in mind, here are a few movies to watch before Christmas rolls around.

To Kill a Mockingbird

During Advent, we wait for and ponder the incarnation. It's the most profound example of active and personified empathy the world has ever seen. The climax of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is characterized by active and sacrificial empathy, when Scout finally understands and comprehends her father's own commitment to "stand in [someone's] shoes and walk around in them."

Children of Men

The timing of Advent in Scripture is remarkably late. It comes after years and years of silence from the heavens, a time when things *would* seem hopeless if God's promise wasn't still hanging in the air for anyone who bothered to look for it. *Children of Men* shows us a bleak, violent world where no one is able to have children. It's a world throbbing with longing, desperate for answers to questions they never thought humanity would have to ask. And in the end, a faint glimmer of hope?

Paddington & Paddington 2

Paddington Bear is not like us. He is too good, too innocent, too forgiving for our world. Yet he feels in all the same ways. It might seem like a stretch, but this fish-out-of-water tale gives us a small taste of what it might be like to be on the outside looking into a dark, fearful world. Paddington's purity acts as a stark contrast to a world without goodness and light. In the end, it points to the story of a pure, innocent babe who would one day grow up beyond Paddington's own unassuming stature into a full-fledged Savior.

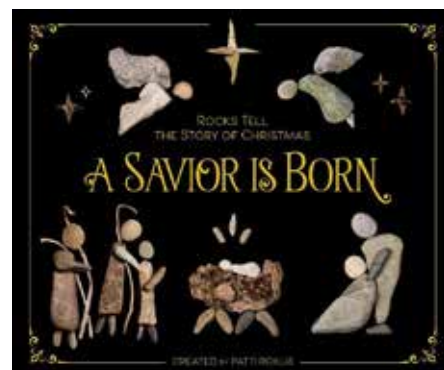
Gravity

To be lost in space serves as a profound metaphor for the human experience, especially when one's own existential need is in clear view. That image of a human being twisting and floating outward, far away from anyone who can help, resonates so deeply with us because of our own human state. We're all grasping whatever we can find to stop us from coasting further away from safety. But our grip always seems to slip. Our only hope, ultimately, is for Someone to catch us.

Though the connections to Advent may not seem obvious at first, these movies will help you get into the same mindset that the waiting and watching Israelites might have had just before the full Messiah story came to life before their eyes. **B**



Richard Clark is an editor at *Christianity Today* and the producer for CT Podcasts.



A Savior Is Born: Rocks Tell the Story of Christmas

by Patti Rokus

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

On a visit to her mother, Patti Rokus began to sort through rocks she had picked up on a solo camping trip. Certain shapes caught her eye. With the help of her mom, Rokus "found the entire Christmas story in that one bucket of rocks." As readers and listeners, young and old alike, learn the backstory of this marvelous children's picture book and linger over its rustic yet exquisite artwork, they will gain a deeper appreciation of the Christmas story and the truth, as Rokus reminds readers, "that all things testify of Jesus Christ." Ages 4 and up. (Zondervan)



Every Step an Arrival: A 90-Day Devotional for Exploring God's Word

by Eugene H. Peterson

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Curated from the late Eugene Peterson's library of sermons, this 90-day collection of devotions focuses on God's work and character. As Peterson reflects on the lives of well-known Old Testament characters, he repeatedly points out that the Bible's main focus isn't on the characters who inhabit its pages. Instead, these are stories "about God's choice of man (of us!) and how he resourcefully and masterfully completes his purpose despite every roadblock, every diversion, every sin, and all unbelief." Each insightful, brief devotion concludes with a meaningful way for readers to pray about what they've read and apply it to their own lives. (WaterBrook)

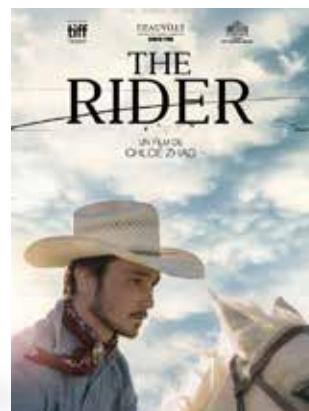


Sing: Creation Songs

by Ellie Holcomb

reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

These seven songs, all based on Scripture, speak words of hope and joy in a way that both children and adults will appreciate. In "Fear Not," for example, based on Isaiah 43, we hear "Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I've called you by name, you are mine." This song and others such as "Do Not Worry" and "Wide, High, Long, Deep" help listeners focus on God's sovereignty and on the joy that comes from being part of his family. These songs are great for a child to listen to before bedtime or in the car. Some would also work well for children singing in a group at church. (Full Heart Music)



The Rider

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Brady Blackburn sustains a head injury after being thrown in the rodeo ring. He must come to terms with the risks of continuing to ride, his dream of a future on the circuit, and the effects of riding injuries on his friend, Lane Scott. Shot on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, *The Rider* features first-time actors Brady Jandreau and Lane Scott as fictionalized versions of themselves. From the grittiness of harsh words to the enduring love and support of family and friends, writer and director Chloe Zhao has created an authentic film that offers much to ponder and discuss for adults and young adults alike. (Sony Classics)

The Lowdown

Good Sport: The latest release in the Calvin Shorts series, *Sport. Faith. Life.* by Brian R. Bolt, offers a quick, engaging overview of how our love for God intersects with our love of competitive play. (Calvin Press)

Ring It On: The Embellish Handbell Ensemble and Chicago Bronze release their joint effort, *Born Is the King of Israel: Handbell Music for Advent and Christmas*, for your listening pleasure. (GIA)

Come Again? The magical, musical nanny makes a comeback in *Mary Poppins Returns*, due out in theaters on the 19th of this month. (Disney)

Watchlist: Both the documentary *Pope Francis: A Man of His Word* and *Beautifully Broken*, a film about how the lives of a Rwandan refugee, a Nashville businessman, and a Rwandan prisoner intersect, are available on DVD this month. Find the *Banner* reviews of each at thebanner.org.

Was the Virgin Birth Real?

Mary's willingness to risk everything allowed all of us to gain so much more.



Mary Hulst is chaplain for Calvin College and teaches at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich.

THE LAST TIME I wrote in this space we looked at the claim of Jesus' resurrection. Frankly, folks, if you believe that a man rose from the dead, believing that his mom conceived him without the help of a male partner isn't that much of a stretch.

Seriously, if you saw the very first *Jurassic Park* movie back in 1993, you may remember that the scientists only cloned female dinosaurs so that the animals could not reproduce. But when one of the characters is wandering through the island, he discovers a nest of eggs. He looks at them, awe-struck, and says, "Nature finds a way!" The biologists among us can point to non-fictional examples of how animals reproduce without the aid of sex: binary fission in bacteria, fragmentation among blackworms, and—most applicable for this conversation—female copperhead snakes reproducing through parthenogenesis, which literally means "virgin birth." A cell produced alongside the female's egg acts as a sperm cell and essentially fertilizes the egg.

So is it much of a stretch to believe that God somehow enabled a human to conceive without sex? No.

But: yes. In bacteria, blackworms, and copperheads, the process is repeated. As far as we know, a human virgin birth has occurred only once. That's the challenge. It happened once, long ago, to a teenage girl who had no witnesses when an angel showed up and announced that the "power of the Most High would overshadow" her and make her pregnant (Luke 1:35). The girl was also engaged at the time. So we are trusting the word of a young girl and her betrothed, who himself thought Mary's story was completely mad and planned to put her away

quietly—until he had his own word from an angel.

Teenage girl. Engaged boy. Angels. No witnesses. Ooookaaaaaay.

In considering the virgin birth, we weigh what we know about science, reproduction, God, and teenagers. In that quartet, the first two seem most verifiable. Until we remember that this God has a long history of messing about in people's reproductive lives. Is this story any more unusual than aged Abraham conceiving with senior citizen Sarah? Is this story any more unbelievable than the times in Scripture when people pray for a child and then have one? Hannah's story is unbelievable. As is Rachel's. As is the story of the mother of Samson. As is the story of Elizabeth, another senior citizen, and her aging husband, Zechariah.

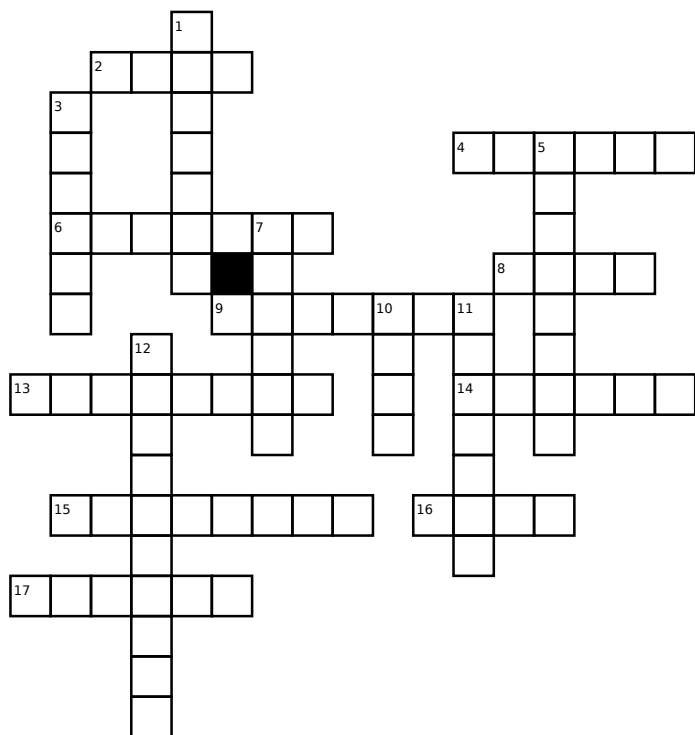
It's that last story that Gabriel cites as evidence for what will happen for Mary: "And now your relative Elizabeth in her old age has conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible for God." Hearing that, Mary goes all in: "Here am I, a servant of the Lord," she tells the angel. "Let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:36-38, NRSV).

All of these stories are hard to believe, which brings us to the heart of the matter: Is *this* a story to be believed? Are we willing to trust the word of a teenager?

Before you answer, consider this: Did Mary gain anything—*anything*—by claiming that the conception was without a man? No. Did she have everything—her standing in the community, the assessment of her mental health, her engagement to a righteous man—did she have everything to lose by claiming "parthenogenesis"? Yes, she did.

There was no good reason for Mary to tell this story except that it was true. And her willingness to risk everything allowed all of us to gain so much more. Thank you, Mary. And thanks be to God. **B**

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

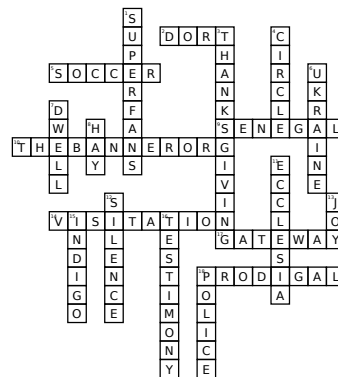


Down

1. A committee's responsibilities assigned by synod
3. The kind of Christmas found at Hope CRC, Stony Plain, Alta.
5. The River Church's Christmas event featured walk-through _____ scenes
7. Signs given by parishioners to pastor
10. A kind of bird in Kenya
11. This issue's youth artist
12. The _____ Catechism

Across

2. Isaiah 43: "____ not."
4. David was a real ____.
6. One of the sacraments
8. Give someone this and he'll eat for a day
9. Advent is a time of _____.
13. *The Message* author
14. Juvenile diabetes advocate Maya Webster traveled here
15. Our view of _____ influences our view of God.
16. The _____ of Christ
17. Language used to minister to West African refugees in Brazil



Answers to the
November 2018 puzzle.

POINT OF VIEW



*Joseph and Mary:
The Journey.*

By Georgia Kibler, Grade
12, Covenant Day School,
Matthews, N.C., a mem-
ber of Christian Schools
International.

Artist's statement:

This piece is a reflection of the story of Joseph and Mary, specifically their journey to Bethlehem. I decided to incorporate the painting into their profiles. Both Mary and Joseph demonstrate bravery in how they trusted God's plan even though it didn't make sense at the time. I wanted to share their story by taking a common painting method (portraits) but painting their story inside.

DEADLINES: 12/3/18 for January; 12/31/18 for February Subject to availability. Details online.

Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

Denominational and Classical

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY

We are pleased to announce that **CALVIN CHEN** 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.

FINANCIAL AID

STUDENTS PREPARING FOR MINISTRY in the Christian Reformed Church from Classis Heartland may apply for aid to assist them in their study for the 2019-2020 academic year by contacting Rev. Loren Kotman; 1111 5th Street, Hull, IA 51239; (712) 439-1123; pastor@hull1stcrch.com. The deadline is February 1, 2019.

General

CLOSING WORSHIP SERVICE Past and present members of 12th Avenue CRC (Jenison, MI) are invited to attend the final worship service on Sunday, December 30, 2018 at 9:30 a.m. This service will celebrate the church's 64 years of ministry before it disbands. Pastors and musicians associated with the church will participate. Rev. Mark Bennink will share a message from Jeremiah 29:11. The Choir will sing anthems of praise. The service will close with the singing of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." Praise the Lord for how he has blessed 12th Avenue Church to be a blessing to God's kingdom.

FINAL CELEBRATION: After 64 years of ministry, Millbrook CRC (Grand Rapids, MI) will be celebrating its final worship service with a legacy gathering on Sunday, January 6, 2019 at 10:00 a.m. Anyone with connections to our church family are welcome to attend. All glory to God!

Church Anniversary

50TH ANNIVERSARY

LIVING HOPE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH of Abbotsford, BC will be celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness March 1-3, 2019. For more info, visit www.livinghopeccr.ca

Birthdays

95TH BIRTHDAY



JOHN UBELS 706 Village LN Jenison, MI 49428 turns 95 on Dec 31. His children, grandchildren, and 8 great-grandchildren thank God for the days in his life and the life in his days.

90TH BIRTHDAY

EDWARD A. JONGSMA of Wheaton, IL celebrated his 90th Birthday on November 27, 2018. Husband of Eleanor (Stob), Children: Ed Jr and Ellen, Sandy

PRICES: Most ads are \$0.41^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.34^{US} per character and \$50 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

and Bruce VanDommelen, David, Beth, Bob and Kim, Kimberly, Karen and Rod Tos, Anne and Matt Vanderkoi. 22 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren. Praise God from who all blessings flow

Anniversary

70TH ANNIVERSARY

VAN HILL Gary and Carolyn (Haveman) 1790 N Trillium Circle Zeeland MI 49464 will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary on December 30, 2018. Children: Doug and Sally, Deb and Ken (Austhof), Kathy and Tom (Timmer), Jeff and Sheila, Evonne and John (Byma), Barb and Vern (Mol); 17 grandchildren and 28 great-grandchildren. Praise God for His goodness and faithfulness!

65TH ANNIVERSARY

KREDIT Ken and Dean Auralee (nee Van Dyke) of Platte, SD & 8700 E University Dr, #1630 Mesa, AZ 85207, will celebrate 65 years of marriage on Dec 22, 2018. Praising God with them: daughter Karen & Tim Schaid, their children Ken (Sarah), Phil (Andrea), & Kimberly; daughter Lois & Dale Leister; daughter Laura & Mike Meyer, their children Rachael & Jennifer; son Roger & Niki (Vermeer) Kredit, their children Claire, Isaac, Jeremiah, Precious, & Josiah; Ken's brother Gordon & MaryLou Kredit. Open house Sat. Dec. 29, 1pm-3pm at Viewpoint RV Resort, North Point if you are able to join us.

NAGEL Douglas and Lois (De Haan) 2529 Autumn Ash Dr., SE Grand Rapids, MI 49512 celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary Dec 17, 2018. Children: Julie Nagel, Joni (Thomas) De Fouw, James (Debra) Nagel, Jan (Peter) Malek. 9 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren. To God be the Glory!

60TH ANNIVERSARY

VANDER ZEE Chester and Betty VanderZee [816 Samara Ave., Volga, SD, 57071] will celebrate 60 years of marriage on December 30. Grateful to God for them and with them are children Karen (Ron) Knutson, Darrel (Carol) VanderZee, Thelene (Mike) Tornow, Sheila (Brian) Kruis, 11 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

Obituaries

BOEHM, Henry, Age 84, of Truro, passed away on Thursday, October 25, 2018, after a brief illness. Born in Rotterdam in 1934 to Adolph Boehm and Wijntje van Berkel, Henry's family survived the devastation of the Second World War, setting their hearts on a new life in Canada. There, Henry felt the call to ministry and departed for Reformed Bible College, where he met his wife and lifelong ministry partner, Jane DeKam. Henry and Jane served the denomination faithfully for more than 40 years, ministering in churches and church plants near Reeman, MI; Hamilton, ON; Grant, MI; Marion,

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MI; Riverdrive Park, ON; Faith CRC (Milford, NS); Pinegate CRC (Cutlerville, MI); Cochrane (ON) CRC; John Calvin CRC (Truro, NS). In his retirement Henry continued to serve, preaching still at 84 years. Henry was predeceased by his parents; brothers, Dolph and Frank; sister, Hedwig; son, Marcus. Survived by wife, Jane; sisters, Joanne and Frieda; children, Stephen and Brenda (DeKam); Elizabeth and Gerald (Wilson); David and Miyuki (Yamada); Rachel and Peter (Van Harmelen); Thomas and Chikako (Muramoto); 10 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren.

BREEMS Martin, age 91, of Sanborn, Iowa, went to meet his Lord and Saviour, October 14, 2018. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 52 years, Lorrene (Bolkema), a daughter-in-law Sue Breems, and a great-grand daughter Autumn Diekevers. Martin is survived by sons Philip (Sherr) Breems, David Breems, Gary (Daisy) Breems and Don (Deb) Breems, as well as 11 grandchildren and 18 great grandchildren. We thank God for his example and his declaration of "Victory in Jesus"

DUBOIS Elaine, age 67, passed away unexpectedly Sept. 22 at her home in Zeeland MI. Elaine was born and raised on a farm in Bozeman, Montana. She received her degree from Trinity Christian College, and substitute taught in the Southwest Chicago Christian Schools. A longtime Evergreen Pk. IL resident, she was an active member of Calvin CRC in Oak Lawn, IL. Her quilting, gardening and baking blessed many. Elaine will be missed by her husband of 45 years, Alvin; children: Mark (Sharon) DuBois, Ryan (Kelly) DuBois, Dale (Laura) DuBois; grandchildren: Natalie, Hope, Sadie, Thijs, Arie, Jansen, Ryk and Calvin. Also surviving are Elaine's father, Herman (Pat) VanderVos; and siblings: Roland (Betty) VanderVos, Connie (Peter) Anderson, Howard (Joyce) VanderVos, Alvin (Rita) VanderVos and Tim VanderVos; in-laws: Emily Seager, Doug DuBois; as well as many nieces and nephews. Elaine was preceded in death by her mother, Theresa (DeBlecourt), sister-in-law, Sharon VanderVos, and brother-in-law, Ron Seager.

HAZEN, Janice, age 83, of Midland Park, NJ went to be with her Lord on Oct. 2, 2018. She was preceded in death by her parents Albert & Jennie Hagedorn Hazen. Surviving are several cousins & their families, & many friends.

MONSMA Geraldine E., age 95 of Wyckoff, NJ died Thursday, October 18, 2018 at the Christian Health Care Center, Wyckoff, NJ surrounded by her loving family. She was born in Paterson, NJ and had been a resident of Wyckoff for over thirty years before moving to Hawthorne, NJ and then back to Wyckoff. Geraldine was a homemaker dedicating her time to care for and raise her family. She was a member of Irving Park Christian Reformed Church, Midland Park, NJ and most recently, Cedar Hill Christian

Reformed Church, Wyckoff, NJ where she had been very active in many church activities. She was a former member and officer of the Eastern Christian High School Ladies Circle. Geraldine was an avid golfer and former member of the Upper Montclair Country Club, Montclair, NJ. Geraldine is survived by her loving children; Ruth E. Monsma of Wyckoff, NJ, Frances G. David of Westmont, IL, Nicholas J. Monsma of San Francisco, CA, and Thomas W. Monsma of Midland Park, NJ, her brother, Matthew Woudenberg and her sister, Marie Kamp both of Grand Rapids, MI. Left to carry on her legacy are her six grandchildren; Randall M., Steven J., William F. David, Jeffrey T. and Benjamin J. Monsma and Gerilyn S. Troupes and her five great grandchildren; Ryan, Samantha, Izabel and Benjamin David and Jane Monsma. Geraldine was predeceased by her husband, William Monsma on June 30, 1999. A private graveside service was held. A Memorial Services will be held on December 2, 2018 at 3:00 PM at Cedar Hill Christian Reformed Church. As an expression of sympathy, in lieu of flowers, donations in Geraldine's memory may be made to Eastern Christian School Association, 50 Oakwood Avenue, North Haledon, NJ 07508 or Cedar Hill Christian Reformed Church, 422 Cedar Hill Avenue, Wyckoff, NJ 07481.

VANDERMOLLEN Scott Lee, age 67 of Gallup, NM passed away on October 17, 2018. Born in Detroit, MI, Scott graduated from Calvin College in 1974 and received a Master's Degree from the University of New Mexico in 1983. He began his teaching career as a student teacher at Rehoboth Christian School in NM and then taught for many years at Zuni Christian Mission School. Following this, he taught at Orlando Christian School in Florida for five years and then returned to New Mexico to teach at A:Shiwi Elementary School in Zuni, NM until his retirement. He was preceded in death by his parents, Gordon and Martha VanderMolen. Surviving is his brother Timothy (Wendy) VanderMolen and their children Nicholas and Stephanie. Memorial Contributions can be made to the Scott VanderMolen Zuni Student Scholarship fund at Rehoboth Christian School, PO Box 41, Rehoboth, NM 87322.

Volunteers

SHORT TERM MISSION Global Outreach Mission is leading a short-term team from Jan 19 to Feb 3, 2019 and is looking for additional members. This team has a variety of opportunities to serve people in Costa Rica. Members will be involved in a medical clinic, a children's ministry and/or construction projects. For more information, please contact Mark at MVanZeelt2004@yahoo.com or 630-792-1754

Church Positions Available

DUNCAN CRC on beautiful Vancouver Island BC is seeking a full-time, dynamic pastor who would be a caring shepherd ministering to all ages in our congregation. More info available on our website duncancrc.org or by contacting the search committee at search@duncancrc.org

ASSOCIATE PASTOR First Christian Reformed Church of Ripon, CA is seeking a full-time Associate Pastor who is a devout man of God, deeply appre-

ciates 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.riponfirstcrrc.org.

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) 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 for our church profile or email us at ministry@telus.net.

CHURCH ADMIN in Silicon Valley Palo Alto CA CRC seeking 20 hr/wk office administrator. For more info please contact Pastor Matthew Burns matthew@pacrc.org



DORDT COLLEGE

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

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Music (Instrumental)
Music (Organ Studies)
Nursing
Theatre Arts
Theology

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.

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.

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March 14 – 24 | Cynthia Slagter

Cultural Tour of Cuba

March 21 – April 1 | John Witte

The Gospel Comes to Italy

March 28 – April 9 | Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima

Netherlands Waterway Cruise

April 12 – 20 | Henk & Thessa Witte

Alaska & Denali

August 31 – September 12 | Mindy Alexander

Tour of the Balkans

September 10 – 25 | John Witte

Ancient Empires

Mediterranean Cruise

September 11 – 24 | Henk & Thessa Witte

Greece & Italy:

In the Footsteps of the Apostle Paul

September 19 – October 1

Pr. Bill & Lyn Vanden Bosch

Following the Footsteps of Jesus:

Israel & Jordan

October 10 - 22 | Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima

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WORSHIP DIRECTOR 2nd Byron CRC, Byron Center, MI is searching for a part time (15-20 hr/wk) person to assist in leading our contemporary morning service. Contact Pastor Adam (pastoradam@secondcsrc.org) or Jim Bolt (james_bolt@att.net) 616-437-6175

PASTOR: Gateway Community CRC in Abbotsford, BC is seeking a full time Pastor of Preaching and Congregational Care who will help us grow in God's Word and service to Him through the preaching of the Word, teaching, and visiting. For more information visit www.gatewaycsrc.org/employment-opportunities or email Marcel deRegt, Executive Pastor, at marcel@gatewaycsrc.org.

GEORGETOWN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH (Ontario, Canada) seeks a part-time Children and

Youth Discipleship Director to work with our ministry leaders and youth to help implement our discipleship priorities. For the job description or to submit your resume, please visit gcr.on.ca or email cydd@gcr.on.ca

YOUTH MINISTRIES COORDINATOR sought by Bellevue CRC (WA). This is a 25 hr/wk position, with a flexible schedule & competitive pay. Contact BCRC at (425)747-5288 or office@bellevuecsrc.org



SEEKING A LEAD PASTOR at the First Christian Reformed Church of Owen Sound, Ontario. We are seeking a pastor to

lead us onto the next stage of our Christian ministry. We are a very unified, friendly fellowship of

around 230 members, located on the spectacular southern shores of Georgian Bay. We are blessed with committed members who wish to continue to be challenged to live out the Christian message throughout their lives. We have several terrific praise teams, a growing congregation and a thriving Christian School. We seek a pastor with a passion for the preached word who will also have the skill set to encourage growth from within and without. If this interests you, please contact Bruce DeBoer at search@owensoundcsrc.com and look up our church profile at owensoundcsrc.com.

WORSHIP DIRECTOR Bethel Community Christian Reformed Church, Newmarket is searching for a part-time/full-time Worship Director to coordinate and lead the worship at its two Sunday services. One is more traditional, focusing on hymns and contemporary worship music geared to an older established demographic while the other is focused on contemporary and emerging worship music geared to an unchurched younger demographic. If interested contact Clara Kalsbeek ckalsbeek@bethelnewmarket.com phone 905-895-8341

SENIOR PASTOR POSITION Ladner CRC is seeking a senior pastor to lead us with Reformed preaching and worship, to nurture our spiritual growth, and to equip us to serve our community. Ladner CRC is located in the city of Delta, part of the Greater Vancouver Area. Job description and church profile are available upon request from John Bandstra at johnb.ferryroad@gmail.com

YOUTH AND ADULT DISCIPLESHIP Lakeside Community Church of Alto, MI is searching for a Full-Time Director of Youth and Adult Discipleship to oversee student ministries and new adult small groups. Position is open to ordained or non-ordained candidates. For more information, email searchteam@lakesidecc.com.

Employment

CONTROLLER Calvin Theological Seminary is searching for a Controller responsible for managing all financial operations starting around February 2019. The job description and application instructions can be found on the job opening page of our website (www.calvinseminary.edu).

PASTOR OF EDUCATION Fellowship CRC in Brighton, ON is seeking a full time Pastor of Education to lead the educational ministries of our church with a special focus on the younger generation. Please visit brightoncsrc.org for more information

Real Estate: Sales and Rentals

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Miscellaneous

WINTER VISITORS Maranatha church welcomes winter visitors beginning Dec 2. We meet at 10 am in Farnsworth Hall 6159 E University, Mesa, AZ 85205. Our website is mesamaranathacrc.net. Our Facebook page is Maranatha Community Church. Check us out. Phone: Rev Harry Weidenaar 480-830-0749.

FINISHING STRONG Safe groups in West Michigan for men seeking sexual purity. See finishingstrong.info for more information or email kenv@finishingstrong.info

Hey Worship Leaders!

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First Christian Reformed Church

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January 10, 7:30 p.m.
First Christian Reformed Church

DEMOTTE, IN

January 11, 7:30 p.m.
First Christian Reformed Church

OSKALOOSA, IA

January 13, 12:45 p.m.
First Christian Reformed Church

DES MOINES, IA

January 13, 7:30 p.m.
Crossroads Fellowship Christian Reformed Church

SIOUX CENTER, IA

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Call for Nominees

In response to a directive from Synod 2018, the Council of Delegates (COD) is establishing a U.S. Committee for Guidance and Support of the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJ)

The committee will guide and support OSJ in addressing all relevant levels of U.S. government on significant and pressing issues of the day from an integrally biblical, theological, and confessional perspective, expressed in terms of a Reformed worldview.

The U.S. Committee will meet twice a year (at least one via video conference) and consider draft plans from staff, resulting in an annual plan to be presented to the COD.

Normally the committee will have eight members, with at least one representative from each of the four CRCNA U.S. regions.

At minimum, committee composition will reflect the diversity goals of the denomination and prioritize representation and voices of those impacted by at least one of the primary justice issues mentioned below.

Membership must primarily consist of persons with expertise in, affected by, and/or lived experience with the primary justice issues OSJ addresses: poverty/hunger, creation care/climate change, immigration/refugees, religious persecution, or abortion.

Members will serve a three-year term renewable for a second three-year term.

To be considered, names should be submitted to rsmith@crcna.org by December 31, 2018.



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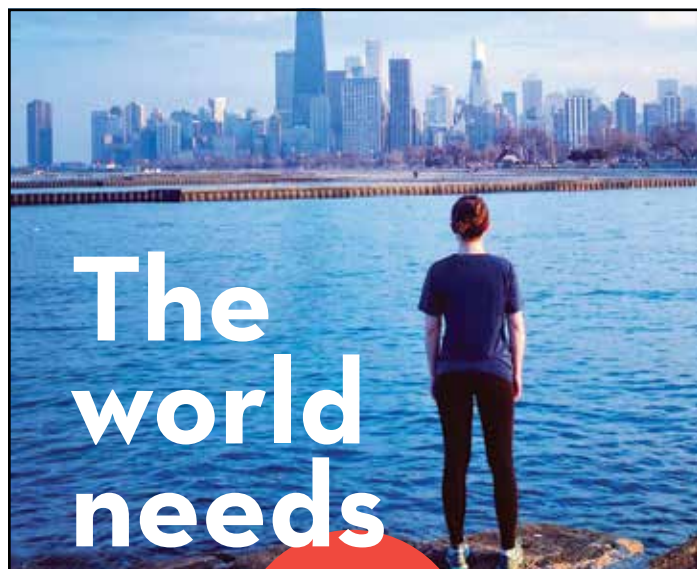
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2018 VISIT DAYS

Friday, December 7

2019 VISIT DAYS

Monday, January 21 (MLK Day / Pre-Health Professions Visit Day)

Friday, February 15 (President's Day)

Friday, March 1

Friday, March 22

Friday, April 5

Friday, April 26

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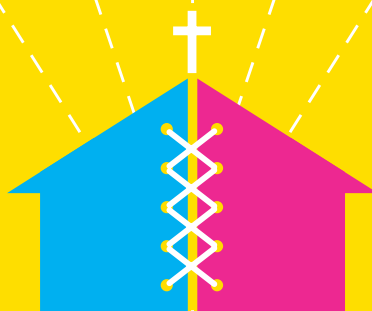
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Quiet Works

Our listening
God is able to
use even what
is unspoken
or unwritten
to comfort us,
transform us,
and shape who
we become.



Adele Konyndyk is a writer and editor who works in communications at World Renew and lives in Hamilton, Ont.

I READ A MEMOIR recently about a poet who is blind. The author, Stephen Kuusisto, finds new freedom when he gets his first guide dog in his late 30s. While most of *Have Dog, Will Travel* captures Kuusisto's years with this spirited Labrador, the book also dips back into the difficulties of his youth in the 1950s and 60s. His parents, who struggled with alcoholism, were ashamed of his blindness and encouraged him to hide it.

Late in the book, Kuusisto recalls wandering into a random church at 17 years old. His young soul is a complex knot of shame, loneliness, and fear. He is battling depression, and his body is dangerously wasting away because of an eating disorder. When the Eucharist is served—a sacrament “of which he knew nothing”—he kneels to partake of the bread and the wine among strangers. As he does so, he feels “his own flesh and blood kissed from somewhere deep and still.”

This is a mystifying and profoundly moving moment for Kuusisto—one that renews his resolve to live. And yet, he notes that he “never mentioned the experience to anyone.” Eventually, of course, he described it in his book, but for decades he kept it to himself.

Kuusisto does not explain exactly why he kept silent all those years—he leaves room for mystery. I do not read his response as motivated by fear or shame, however. The more I reflect on it, the more I appreciate it.

Perhaps I find Kuusisto's response refreshing because I am reading it within the context of our culture, which gives us more opportunities than ever to instantly broadcast everyday happenings. These days, for example, many of us use social media

to rush curated expressions of our life into public space. We can equate visibility with significance.

To be sure, there is empathetic power to sharing our occasions of joy, sorrow, and everything in between, with each other. The act of storytelling can bring the imagery of communion to mind—a kind of passing of the “elements” of our existence among fellow members of the body. Is it selfish, then, to keep a moment to oneself?

I think of the hushed cherishing of Mary. After the shepherds came to worship her son, she “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19), and after she and Joseph find young Jesus talking to the teachers in the temple, she again “treasured all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:49-51).

It often takes great trust to share our lives with the exterior world. But experiences intimately held between us and our Creator have value too. Maybe some moments belong in that interior space for a time.

Our listening God is able to use even what is unspoken or unwritten to comfort us, transform us, and shape who we become. For God's good purposes, he will faithfully equip us to ponder and savor flashes of his grace—to trust in how the quiet works. **B**

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