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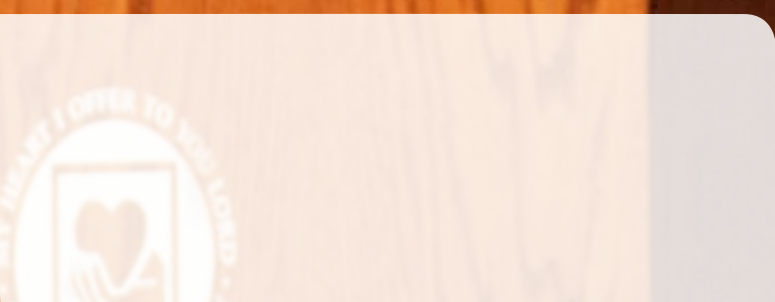
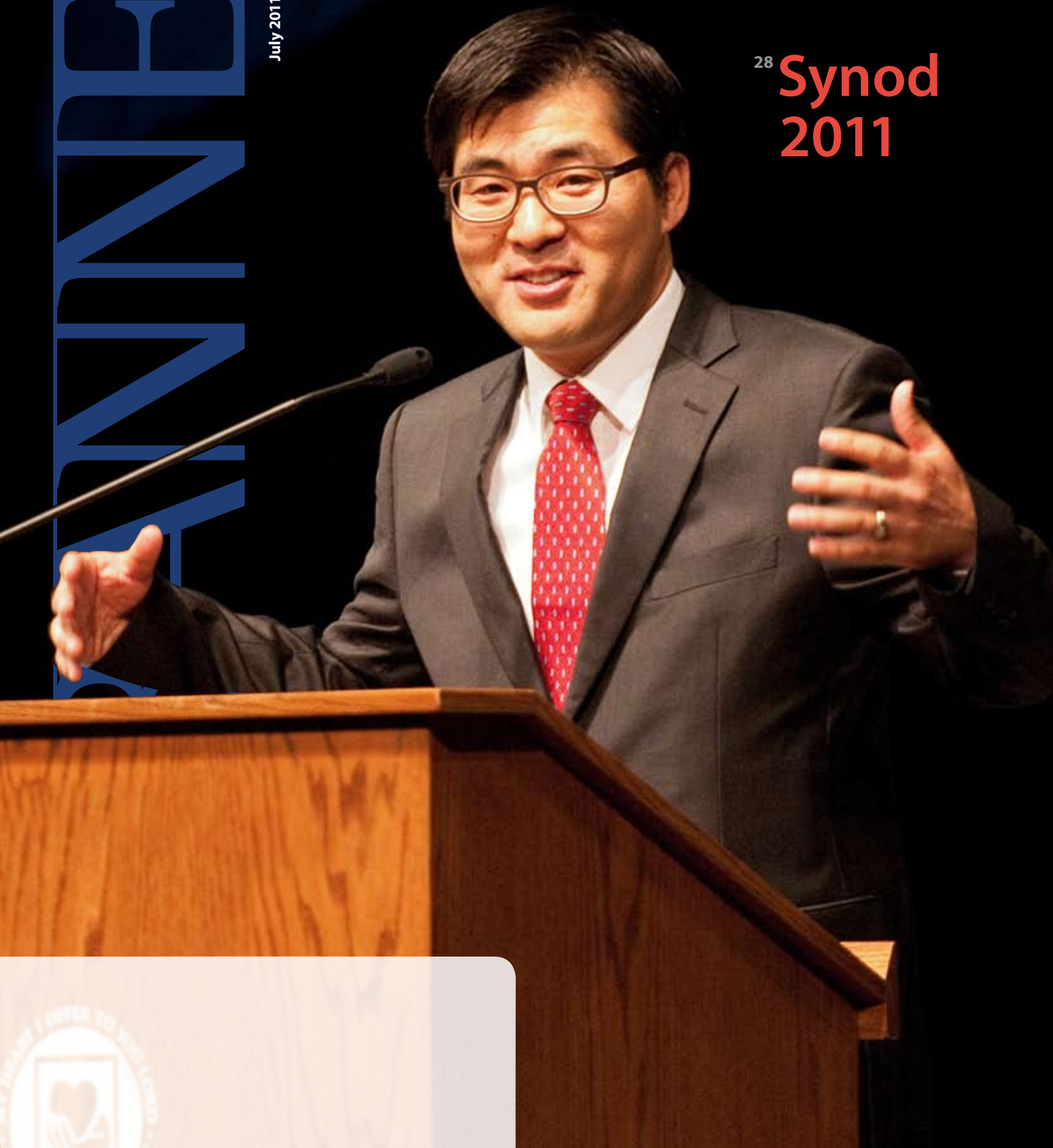
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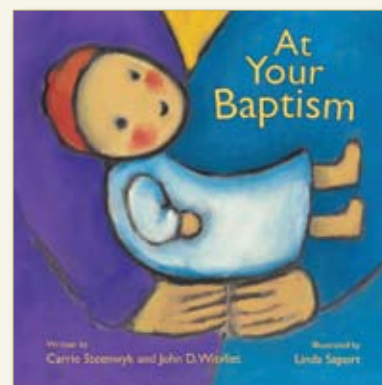
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Cover: Rev. Moses Chung, newly appointed director of Christian Reformed Home Missions, focuses on prayer as a key part of his life and ministry (p. 42).

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Published monthly (12 issues per year).
Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids,
Mich. Postmaster, send address changes
to: The Banner, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49560. 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 2011, Faith Alive Christian
Resources, a ministry of the Christian
Reformed Church. Printed in U.S.A.
The Banner (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 146,
No. 07, 2011.

Member of Associated Church Press and
Evangelical Press Association.

The More We Get Together . . .

HOW DO WE REUNITE WHAT (ARGUABLY) SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN DIVIDED? From our 21st-century perspective the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) was woefully misbegotten.

In 1857 four congregations of recent immigrants from the Netherlands left what is now called the Reformed Church in America (RCA) to strike out on their own. Their reasons for walking now seem foreign:

- The RCA was too American for the CRC folks, who wanted to speak and stay Dutch.
- The RCA did not sufficiently support the CRC folks' cause against the church they had split from in the Netherlands.
- The RCA allowed visitors to the Lord's Table (communion) instead of restricting participation to members only.
- The RCA didn't restrict songs sung in worship services to the psalms, but also sang hymns.

Today those reasons seem wrongheaded. Our split wasn't about truth and heresy, about rejection of Scripture, creeds, or Reformed confessions. It was about culture and questionable church practices.

Splitting a church is like shattering a bone. The break happens all too quickly and easily. But the healing process, if even possible, takes a long, long time and lots of strenuous, painful effort.

By God's grace that work has already begun. In fact, this year the CRC and the RCA held their first-ever joint synod (denominationwide leadership meeting) between the wrap-up of the CRC's synod and the start of the RCA's (see p. 30).

In that joint meeting the combined synods did two things: (1) They adopted jointly produced translations of our shared confessions, which will make it easier for us to share liturgical resources and study materials. (2) They also celebrated the work we're already doing together. To name a few items from a much longer list:

- Sharing of pastors
- Joint congregations and new church starts
- Joint resource distribution and publication
- Leadership resourcing and education
- Collaborative disabilities ministries
- Mission, relief, and development work

There's more to come. The more we work together, the more we trust and like each other. So we find even more areas to work together.

The rumor mill is beginning to grind—will our successful dating lead to marriage? Who knows? There *are* serious obstacles we'd need to overcome: opposite approaches to Christian education, structural differences on how local churches relate to the denomination, different polarities and cultures, among others.

So eloping seems out of the question. We'll need to take it slow: a joint synod meeting here, a joint worship service there. . . . And in the meantime, let's do even more stuff together, like

- Have our colleges and seminaries synchronize their offerings to allow for greater specialization and mutual coordination of programs, courses, etc.
- Integrate more denominational services—why duplicate?
- Plan joint classis meetings; maybe even integrate classes (regional groups of churches) and their work somehow.

Let's take our time but also further steps. Jesus pleaded, "I pray that all of them will be one, [Father,] just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21).

The more we get together, the happier He'll be. ■



Rev. Bob De Moor is editor of *The Banner* and pastor of preaching and administration for West End CRC, Edmonton, Alberta.

Will our successful dating lead to marriage?

2011

Candidates for the Ministry

“COME, FOLLOW ME.” Those words inspire every disciple of Christ in general and everyone who aspires to vocational ministry in particular. On these next few pages you will find the people approved by Synod 2011 as new candidates for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. Each has responded to the Voice. Each is committed to following and serving the Lord and Savior of the church.

Those who lead the church must first and foremost be followers—followers of Christ. These men and women recognize that truth, and they have demonstrated their readiness to follow and to lead by completing the prescribed course of training for ministry. We, the church, are grateful for their dedication and their months of hard work. We’re grateful for the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary, which has played a crucial role in the preparation of these candidates. We’re also grateful for the many pastors and local churches who have mentored them and given them opportunities to learn and grow.

Now these candidates are eligible for a call—ready to serve the rest of us followers of Jesus. Some will become local church pastors, some will plant new churches, some will serve as chaplains, some will work in other ministry settings. All will need our support, our prayers, our encouragement, and our participation in the ministries to which they are assigned. Lift them up in prayer today and in future days. Their immediate future is unknown, and the waiting room they enter will be a challenge. Yet their eagerness to serve is consistent, and they have clearly confessed their confidence in the Lord they follow. May God bless each of them and each of us as we continue to follow on the journey God has planned. For more detailed information on any of the candidates, you may go to the Candidacy Committee website: www.crcna.org/pages/candidates11.cfm. ■

—Rev. David Koll
Director of Candidacy

*Asterisks indicate candidates who are not eligible for call until they have completed all requirements.



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A Gospel Not of Human Origin



ON THE FIRST DAY

of my first seminary internship, someone left a message on the church answering machine. A 92-year-old member

of the congregation had had a stroke. Things were not going well. He had been moved to hospice care and was being made comfortable for his last days.

I had taken two years of theology classes, history classes, and pastoral care classes, and now, on my first day of my first internship, a man was dying. His sons were flying in from around the country to be with him in his final hours. And I, as a representative of the church, needed to be there too, to give pastoral care, to be the pastor.

At synod this year I was declared a candidate for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. My classmates and I are out looking for jobs, desiring to be pastors. Some of us head into this with lots of experience after a lifetime of service to God and the church, returning to it now after getting an M.Div. Others of us are new, straight out of college and seminary and excited to jump into ministry. We come from many different backgrounds, with many different life stories and callings.

Paul says in Galatians 1:11-12, “I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” He goes on to talk about how he didn’t get this message from the big guys in Jerusalem. Paul points to Jesus Christ. Paul’s authority to speak is under attack, but he doesn’t defend himself with his laurels and experience.

He talks about Jesus. He talks about the gospel not of human origin.

In that moment last summer at the hospice center with the church member and his sons, I knew I didn’t walk into that room alone. I walked into that room with the gospel not of human origin. And that holds true when I stand behind the pulpit to preach words to people who have been dedicated Christians for longer than I have been alive, to people whose faith has been through battles and survived, to people who have walked through the valley of the shadow of death yet still walk with the Lord. I do not preach my words, but the words of the gospel not of human origin.

As C.S. Lewis put it in *Mere Christianity*, “I think all Christians would agree with me if I said that though Christianity seems at first to be all about morality,

all about duties and rules and guilt and virtue, yet it all leads you on, out of all of that, into something beyond. One has a glimpse of a country where they do not talk of those things, except perhaps as a joke. Everyone there is filled full with what we should call goodness as a mirror is filled with light. But they do not call it goodness. They do not call it anything. They are not thinking of it. They are too busy looking at the source from which it comes.”

Synod 2011 declared us candidates. Not because some bigwigs in Grand Rapids think we ought to be. Not because we are the most experienced. But because of the gospel not of human origin. We are all called to proclaim the gospel not of human origin. We are all called to live it. But some of us, pastor types, are called to make it our profession. ■



Thyra VanKeeken is a student at Calvin Theological Seminary who will finish her Masters of Divinity this coming December. While in Grand Rapids she attends Boston Square CRC, but considers Bethel CRC in Edmonton, Alberta, her home and native land.

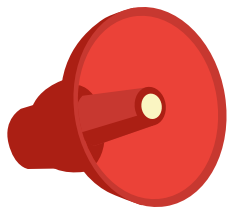


God packages and distributes
his divine gift in ordinary,
very undivine humanity,
so that we will not admire
the wrapping so much
that we discount the gift.

—LEWIS SMEDES

Fighting Fair





“IF YOU CAN’T SAY ANYTHING NICE, don’t say anything at all.” Jesus didn’t heed that advice from Thumper Rabbit’s mother. Apparently neither Mary nor Joseph turned up the oil lamp to read Disney’s version of *Bambi* to him.

Rather, reading the gospels we often hear Jesus’ strong denunciations of people and practices that perpetuate injustice. Sometimes, Jesus’ words were not “nice.” For example, in Revelation 3 a passionate Christ tells the Laodicean church, “Because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth” Not nice, but needed!

God’s Word is clear: we are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Yet despite Paul’s directive, our speech is often neither loving nor truthful.

Jesus’ brother James didn’t hear Mom Thumper’s admonition, but he does warn us, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (1:19). And James drives that home with a promise: “. . . not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do” (v. 25). He suggests we keep a “tight rein” on our tongues. If we don’t, we deceive ourselves and our religion is worthless (v. 26).

If James were writing today, I imagine he’d also suggest “a tight rein” on emails and YouTube videos that go viral because of our innate desire for the latest exposé. Missionary Grace Tazelaar wrote in a letter to a supporting church 20 years ago, “It is my hope that technology enhances communication and promotes understanding, rather than becoming a barrier to them.” Reading her words, I wonder about recent Internet exchanges, voices drawing grandiose conclusions based on miniscule information.

We also need to heed another of Paul’s commands to the Ephesians: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs” (Eph. 4:29). God’s Word needs application to more than just our mouths.

God didn’t make a mistake when he made us with passionate emotions and feelings. Nor did God make a mistake when he made us capable of sophisticated means of communicating. God wants words to encourage and comfort, as well as to challenge.

Our intent in any communication must be to build up and benefit others, especially members of God’s family. But being family is no excuse for saying whatever we want. Being family means compassionate communication with a genuine Christ-like concern for each other.

So when will I learn to listen before speaking out? What will it take for each of us to do so?

What the Church Can Learn from Marriage

When I meet with couples about to engage in the adventure of marriage, we take one whole hour to reflect on “Fighting Fair to Clear the Air.” We discuss 12 strongly-worded directives that

would have Thumper’s huge ears flopping to avoid saying what’s not “nice.” I’ve handed these *Guidelines for Successful Marital Disagreements* to already-married couples too, and I think several are particularly applicable for disagreement within the family of God called the Christian Reformed Church. We’ve been all-too-ready to jump ship rather than work from a commitment to serve and stay together. Sadly, we’ve seized on divorce and going our separate ways as an option all too often.

Guideline 1 goes like this: *Express your opinions, desires, and concerns as calmly and clearly as possible. Be willing to listen actively as well as talk. Share your feelings as well as your thinking.*

Obvious? Of course! Easily done? Not quite! When we have a fundamental difference of understanding with someone, it’s tempting to walk away. We stop listening because we think, “I can’t believe you see it that way!” We mix our feelings with our opinions and confuse the two. Passionate tones replace clear enunciation of issues, and we turn away from each other. To avoid that, I’ve advised stressed couples to sit together in a restaurant booth, hold hands across the table to signify their commitment to the relationship, and talk calmly and clearly. In doing so, I remind them to keep in mind guideline 2: *Appreciate the*

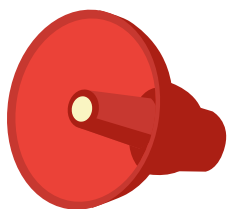
How we express our differences is crucial.

other person’s viewpoint, even if it doesn’t make sense to you at the time. Appreciate feelings for what they are, whether or not they seem rational to you.

How many marriages have remained intact or been enhanced as a result, I don’t know. But I do know the advice is applicable to the complex relationships within churches. As a delegate to synod, I’ve listened to speeches and wondered, “How did he ever come to that conclusion? It doesn’t make any sense—none at all.” And what happens? I stop listening, often dismissing the person as well as his or her thinking. In marriages we can’t afford to do that, and we certainly can’t afford to do that within the body of Christ.

Don’t withdraw. Silence ends effective communication. No doghouses, states guideline 7. That means we hold hands and keep talking, maybe relishing the quiet for just a while.

Locally and denominationally, we email, phone, or text, sometimes across continents, but we do not often take the time or effort to talk face to face. Physical walls often result in a barricade of communication. Thinking about these things, I remind myself that God neither texted or emailed his Word. He incarnated it—walking in the garden, anointing prophets, and sending his Son. »



We cannot deny the powerful impact of words. Christ's words from the cross begin with "Father, forgive them" and end with "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." They speak to an enviable relationship of confidence and commitment. Jesus knew his Father would forgive.

He knew his Father would receive him. Our words as members of God's family must reflect a similar confidence and commitment to each other.

The world needs to see our lofty theological concepts expressed in nitty-gritty living, especially when we disagree. Otherwise, as James notes, our religion is worthless. Who we are in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) must lead to living as children of the light, especially in our communication.

Doctrine must lead to doing. Our core beliefs must mean consistent behavior. We live in relationships as new creatures in Christ. That doesn't mean we see everything the same way. Good! As Abraham Lincoln wisely said, "If two people agree on everything, only one of them is thinking!"

When a couple suggests their perfect harmony to me, I'm tempted to respond, "If two people always agree, it's a dull marriage." Neither is it good to always agree within the church. It's not healthy for one person to determine what we need to think or believe.

In Acts 15:7 we read, "After much discussion, Peter got up. . . ." Imagine the scene and the strong feelings! What's covered by the word *discussion*? I suggest it all wasn't as calm or as clear as possible. Peter is followed by Barnabas and Paul, who share their experiences of God at work among the Gentiles. And "the whole assembly became silent as they listened" (15:12). Understanding God's work means listening to hear what God *is* doing, not what we think God *ought* to be doing.

How we express our differences is crucial. There's a world watching, drawing conclusions. Jesus' high priestly prayer (John 17) demands that we be careful in our disagreeing: our "complete unity" lets the world know that the Father sent the Son and loves "them even as you have loved me" (17:23).

Paul writes, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). As members of one body, we cannot write a person off because he doesn't seem important or she thinks differently (1 Cor. 12). There's no room for distorting the truth to gain advantage. That's the Tempter's *modus operandi*.

As followers of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Truth, we must speak the truth—in love. Yes, sometimes that means saying things that are not "nice," but *how* we do so makes all the difference.

We don't say whatever comes to mind. We are members of one body called to maintain meaningful dialogue regarding

Guidelines for Successful (Marital) Disagreements

1. Express your opinions, desires, and concerns as calmly and clearly as possible. Be willing to listen actively as well as talk. Share your feelings as well as your thinking.
2. Appreciate the other person's viewpoint, even if it doesn't make sense to you at the time. Appreciate feelings, whether they seem rational or not.
3. Remember that timing is essential. Don't start something when you have to leave shortly or when you're on your way to church or bed or elsewhere.
4. No name calling! It hurts and assassinates character.
5. Don't zero in on vulnerable areas. We all have an Achilles' heel.
6. Forget old scores and arguments. Stick to the present disagreement. Avoid collusion with references to "my father" or "my brother-in-law" as well as generalizations such as "You always."
7. Don't withdraw. Silence ends effective communication. No doghouses!
8. Give up accusations, vulgarity, verbal abuse, or shouting down. Threats of separation, divorce, "going home to Mom," or suicide are blackmail. Noise is no substitute for communication.
9. Avoid playing analyst or shrink with your spouse, whatever your education.
10. Do not engage in physical violence. Adults talk things through, while children act out.
11. Remember that tears can be a form of psychological intimidation based on previous success. Understand what tears mean in your relationship.
12. Know when to call a truce. If emotions run out of control—STOP! Take time to cool down and reflect. Get back to it later. (Normally it's best to finish your fight and move on. Dragging it out and out is sinful!)

—George Vink. Guidelines drawn from several sources over the years.

different viewpoints while focusing on the truths that unite us. If we believe we must point out error, we'd better be sure our correction is based on truth given by God. When Jesus speaks to the church in Laodicea, he does so as one intimately acquainted. He confronts out of love, expecting a change of heart and behavior.

What would Jesus say today about our use of words and our commitment to each other? Ignoring Thumper's mom, let's hold hands and communicate—clearly, calmly, and compassionately! ■



Rev. George Vink is senior pastor of First Christian Reformed Church in Visalia, Calif.

Substance amid Vagueness

I WHOLEHEARTEDLY AGREE that our Reformed confessions are treasures, not liabilities.

When I was younger, I faithfully attended my church's catechism classes each Wednesday. Every so often I would have to memorize a few of the Heidelberg's questions and answers. I remember pacing back and forth in my basement, trying to memorize the answer to "What is true faith?"

Since I've left home for college, I've had several discussions with friends about faith and life. In the course of those conversations, I've never been asked "What is true faith?"—though I wonder whether it would ever be appropriate to rattle off a memorized answer.

The questions my friends and I have about life are more existential than doctrinal. We ask questions like "What should I do with my life?" You would think that doctrinal confessions would be unable to answer these questions.

What I've found, however, is that knowing doctrine—through the Heidelberg Catechism's questions and answers or other confessions—is a necessary foundation for wrestling fruitfully with the existential questions. Without knowing that I belong to God, that I sin and am redeemed, and that my best response is a life of obedient gratitude, there is no way I could even get started on discerning my life's purpose.

You might ask why Scripture alone is not enough for the church or for me. If confessions are merely summaries of Scripture, why are they so important? And is it worth splintering the church to hold fast to a strong position on, say, predestination, as subscribing to the Canons of Dort would seem to involve?

Confessions remind me that I do not read Scripture alone, but as part of a church with a history. The confessions explain why the Christian Reformed Church holds the particular positions it does, for example,

regarding predestination and infant baptism. They show that the church stands behind these beliefs because it believes they are well-grounded in Scripture.

In addition, the confessions can illuminate Scripture insightfully—for instance, the catechism presents the Ten Commandments as a rule of gratitude.

Recently I read through a survey of young adults' attitudes toward religion. The results show that most of my peers see all religions as basically the same, accomplishing the same purpose of making people better. Against such vagueness, the confessions sketch a rich theology that rewards those who dig deeper. If the church is going to boldly claim to have the Truth, we need something worthwhile and solid to present to those who seek it out.

Moreover, the confessions help give my faith substance and content in sound doctrine. Partially because I have been taught the confessions, I not only say that I believe, but I can point to specific things I believe in. The confessions draw out the communal aspect of faith. Sharing the confessions with my church and denomination means that I believe the same things as thousands of other people and that I belong with them.

After those years of catechism classes, I made my profession of faith in front of my church. The confessions helped me understand what I was "getting into" by becoming a deeper part of the church. When I said I believed, that meant something substantial, and I still stand behind what I professed.

I, for one, have been blessed by my instruction in the confessions and am glad to be part of a church that deeply values them. ■

John Kloosterman was a young adult adviser to Synod 2011. He is a member of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Barrie, Ontario. He is studying philosophy and computer science at Calvin College.

TEXT



Confessions remind me that I do not read Scripture alone, but as part of a church with a history.

A Cure for NDD

Do you have NDD? That's Nature Deficit Disorder. You get it when you don't spend much time outside. Symptoms include a fear of tiny creatures and little interest in or knowledge of God's creation.

Doctors don't officially diagnose NDD, but many kids (and lots of adults) have it. And that's a problem, because God gave humans the job of caring for creation. But how can we care for God's creation if we don't know much about it?

Thankfully, the cure for NDD is simple: you just go outside and do things.

When was the last time you got excited about something in creation? Do you think you might have Nature Deficit Disorder? If you do, try these activities—you might like them!

Wiggle a Worm

Have you ever seen an earthworm's mouth? You can try. Here's how: First, take a shovel outside. Find a spot with lots of dirt. Push the shovel straight into the dirt, as far down as you can. Then wiggle the handle back and forth, so that the shovel blade wiggles. Earthworms hate this, and it often makes them come to the surface.

Spit on your fingers to moisten them. Then very gently pick up an earthworm and look at it. Can you find the mouth? Can you even tell the front end from the back?

Let the worm go before it becomes dry. It has to stay moist because it breathes through its skin. If it dries out, it will "suffocate."

While you have the shovel, turn over a bit of dirt and see what you can find. All sorts of creatures besides earthworms call that dirt home: young beetles, cicadas, flies, some spiders, harvestmen (daddy longlegs), ants, and lots more.

Wiggle a worm and you can start a lifetime of discovery.



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Beat a Bush

You'd be surprised at the number spiders and bugs that live outside nearby. You don't always see them because they hide when they see you coming. They're afraid of you. (Why are some people afraid of them?) But you can spy on them to see who's where and what each looks like.

You'll need a white or light-colored pillowcase (or a large sheet of white paper) and a clear plastic container. Spread the pillowcase out flat on the ground underneath a bush. Then shake the bush as hard as you can, right over the pillowcase. Watch what falls onto the cloth or paper.

Some little dark things that fall won't move. Those are probably bush parts. Other little things will get up and run away. Those are the bugs and spiders. Watch them go. Are they fast or slow? Do they head toward a sunny spot or toward shade? How many legs does each have? Do some have wings? Why don't they fly?

Want a closer look? Slap the plastic container over one and watch it. Never handle a little critter with your bare hands. You may crush it or it may bite you. Let it go when you're finished watching it.

Here's a helpful hint: Bugs are "solar powered." After a cool night, they need to "charge their batteries" (warm up) in the sun before they can move much.

So when's the best time to beat a bush?

Follow a Flower

What happens to a flower after it's done blooming? Does it die and disappear? No! When it's done blooming, a flower becomes something else.

What it becomes depends on the flower. For example, a dandelion flower becomes a silky ball of parachutes with seeds. A milkweed flower becomes a pod of white fluff with seeds attached. Oak flowers become acorns.

You get the idea: flowers become something-with-seeds. Each kind of flower makes a different "something."

You can watch the change from flower to something-with-seeds. Here's how: Tie a twist-tie under each flower you want to watch. Choose a few different kinds of flowers and a few flowers of each kind. Guess what each will become: A berry? A sandbur? Just a little "thing"? Come back often to check on your plants. What the flowers become will probably surprise you.

Adopt a Tree

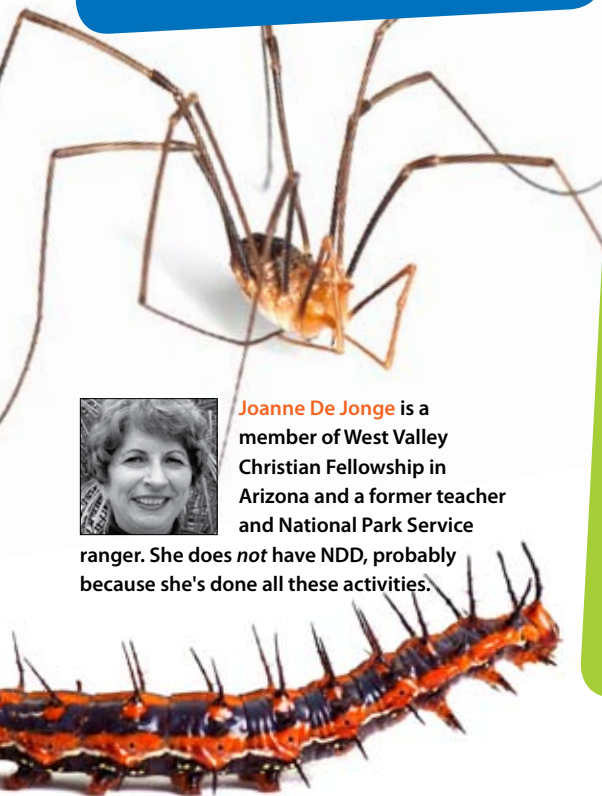
Trees are some of God's most magnificent creations. When you adopt one, you claim your own special piece of creation that you can watch, sit under, climb, listen to, and learn about for years to come. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Learn its name.** Does your tree have leaves or needles? Trees with leaves are called "broadleaved." Trees with needles are called "conifers," after the cones they make.
- **Measure it.** Face away from the tree, walk a few steps, then look upside down between your legs. Move forward or backward until you can see the top of your tree. Now stand up straight and walk back to the tree, counting your steps. That number will be roughly how tall your tree is in feet. Measure it this way again next year to see if the tree grows.
- **Meet the creatures who live there.** Look for nests. Watch the trunk for ants. Crack fruits or nuts open to see what's living inside. Pry apart curled leaves. Check for caterpillars. Sit quietly beneath your tree. You'll learn a lot about creation by watching movements and listening to quiet sounds.
- Be sure to **say thanks** for this wonderful world God gave you to enjoy and to care for. It's your cure for NDD!



Joanne De Jonge is a member of West Valley Christian Fellowship in Arizona and a former teacher and National Park Service

ranger. She does not have NDD, probably because she's done all these activities.



A Friend on the Radio



ILIA HORSBURG

STUART MCLEAN LIKES THE INCONSEQUENTIAL. The motto of his radio show, “The Vinyl Cafe,” is “We may not be big, but we’re small.” The bestselling Canadian author shares big truths hidden in the small things.

But McLean’s storytelling tours sell out to large and small theatres across North America, and the beloved “Vinyl Cafe” radio show from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation continues to grow on public radio stations in the United States, on Sirius channel 137, on podcast, and online.

Each radio show starts with McLean’s story exchange, an opportunity for listen-

ers to share their own short and true anecdotes. You’ll snicker at “Self-Inflicted Hit and Run,” reflect on life lessons with “Meeting the Queen,” and be moved by “Vimy Ridge.”

Then McLean shares an essay about everyday life. He’ll talk about his lost to-do list, praise the sport of curling, or write an ode to the potato. In these light-hearted monologues, he includes local details, celebrating places like Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., or Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. Recently, he’s selected and revised an entertaining collection of these essays in *The Vinyl Cafe Notebooks* (Viking).

His eclectic taste in music is also a highlight of his shows. McLean’s musical friends join his tour, including guitar legend Randy Bachman as well as up-and-comers like The Wailin’ Jennys, Dala, and Matt Andersen.

Every time “The Vinyl Cafe” goes on tour, McLean writes a new “Dave and Morley” story. Listeners enjoy the folksy way he reads them, and his 10 short story collections are full of everyday mishaps. Dave, the owner of a secondhand record store, is a decent guy who can’t seem to keep himself out of trouble. Dave’s wife, Morley, their children, Sam and Stephanie, and others show up in the stories. They might be exploring do-it-yourself water slides, toilet training their pets, or cooking the Christmas turkey.

A good radio host makes listeners feel as though they are part of an intimate conversation, no matter how big the audience. Radio and fiction are personal media. McLean brings listeners and readers to laughter, tears, and reflection. That makes Stuart McLean a friend. ■



Ron VandenBurg is a Christian school teacher and a theatre and media buff. He is a member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines, Ontario.



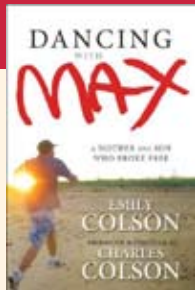
American Icons

reviewed by **Otto Selles**

It is a truth universally acknowledged among joggers, businesses travelers, and insomniacs that an iPod loaded with intelligent and entertaining podcasts is a marvelous possession. If you are looking for something new, try the “American Icons” series presented by Kurt Anderson’s Studio 360. The series profiles everything from literary works (*The Great Gatsby*, *Moby Dick*) to historic sites (Jefferson’s Monticello, the Lincoln Memorial) to American pop culture icons (Buffalo Bill, Harley-Davidson, Barbie). The documentary style is lively and amusing, offering fresh perspectives on American society. (Free on iTunes or at www.studio360.org)

A good radio host makes listeners feel as though they are part of an intimate conversation.





Dancing with Max

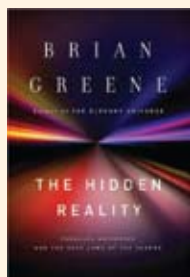
by **Emily Colson**, with **Charles Colson**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen**
Feddema

When Emily Colson's son Max was diagnosed with autism, her friend said, "God works through these children. They are a gift. Max is a gift." Consequently, Colson refused to allow labels like "noncompliant" and "unteachable" to define Max. As she explains in *Dancing with Max*, she rejected the world's "can't do" list for him, and, with God's help, met him where he was and joined him in his interests. In the process, Max became a teacher to many, including his mother and his grandfather, Charles Colson. (Zondervan)

The Hidden Reality

by **Brian Greene**
reviewed by **Phil Christman Jr.**

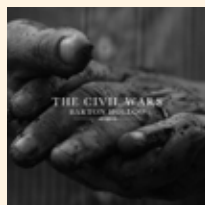
Brian Greene is our generation's Carl Sagan: a scientific genius who happens to have a gift for analogy and explanation. His two previous books managed to be elegant, lucid, and funny about relativity, quantum mechanics, and string theory; *The Hidden Reality* examines several possible versions of the idea that our universe is only one among (or within) many. It's only a little more confusing than an episode of "Fringe" and even more entertaining. Buy it before the inevitable PBS miniseries. (Knopf)



Barton Hollow

by **the Civil Wars**
reviewed by **Robert J. Keeley**

The Civil Wars is the singing/songwriting duo of Joy Williams and John Paul White. Most of the



songs on *Barton Hollow*, their debut album, feature both of their

voices interweaving with each other in subtle and effective ways. The arrangements are sparse; featuring White's acoustic guitar with other carefully added instruments, the focus is on how warmly the two voices connect. The songs deal thoughtfully with heartache and yearning in a way that isn't trite or maudlin but shows real people in real situations. (Sensibility Music)

Hundred More Years

by **Francesca Battistelli**
reviewed by **Paul Delger**

Francesca Battistelli's second album, *Hundred More Years*, offers catchy, light songs on themes like grace, love, forgiveness, and God's goodness. Battistelli begins with an instant radio hit, "This Is the Stuff," which centers on the fact that God can use mundane incidents, like losing your keys, to grow a person. She recently won the Dove Award for Artist of the Year for her work on her first album, *My Paper Heart*. (Fervent Records)



Images of God for Young Children

by **Marie-Hélène Delval**
reviewed by **Gwen Marra**

A metaphor is a powerful literary tool that brings readers to a deeper level of understanding. In this children's book, Delval combines metaphors from the Bible with simple language to convey biblical truths about God. Each page contains words and images that encourage children to see God in their world. Families reading this thought-provoking text may enjoy writing their own metaphors about God or illustrating the metaphors from the text. This beautiful book could be read any time, but would be suitable during devotions or as a bedtime read-aloud. (Eerdmans)



THE LOWDOWN



Reel Books: Books hitting the movie screen this month: *Sarah's Key* (Weinstein),

Snow Flower and the Secret Fan (Fox Searchlight), *Winnie the Pooh* (Disney), and (in case you haven't heard) *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part II* (Warner Bros.).



Bright Idea: Owl City follows up its hit electronica album, *Ocean*

Eyes, with a sophomore effort entitled *All Things Bright and Beautiful* (Universal Republic).



Lion Shares: *The Lion Guide to the Bible* by Peter Walker and *The One-Stop Bible*

Atlas by Nick Page offer helpful information in nicely illustrated books. (Kregel)



And FYI: If you want more information about the

land of the Bible, try *Follow the Rabbi.com*, a website from That the World May Know Ministries.

Check thebanner.org for links to find out more about these titles.



Too Busy?

ONCE UPON A TIME, while at the annual meeting of the Christian Reformed Church, I became acquainted with the late Rev. Bill Haverkamp. When he found out that both of us were born in the same small town in the Netherlands and could still speak the “original” language, he insisted that every day after lunch we walk around Calvin’s campus together to converse in our native tongue.

He talked about the “good old days” when he served one of the larger churches, preached two times every Sunday, taught all the catechism classes, and did family visiting, funerals, weddings, and all the other things a minister was supposed to do. And he bemoaned the fact that churches were beginning to introduce staff people for every job expected of ministers in his day.

Since I was young and smart, I felt I knew much better what churches needed. I vigorously defended staff ministry. This was a new day, and specialized ministries in congregations are a must, I countered.

Now that I am much older and know much less, I still feel just as strongly about the importance of staff ministry. As a church for the 21st century, we need to use the different gifts the Lord gives to us. One person simply does not have all the gifts needed to do the things expected of a minister.

But I do wonder: Could it be that in some instances the multiplication of positions is simply because some ministers consider themselves too busy to do what they were called to do?

An elder from another church called to ask me for advice. His church was introducing a second morning service, and both of their two ordained ministers felt that would make them too busy to preach at the evening service. I also know a couple of ministers who claim they are



Does your church expect too much from your pastor?

“too busy” doing ministry, but they do have the time to babysit during the day or help with educating their children.

I’m sure some ministers *are* too busy. But in my opinion, many are no busier than the people in their churches with full-time jobs who volunteer or attend meetings a couple of times a week.

Time to Reevaluate?

Perhaps ministers and their churches should take some time to evaluate the roles of pastors and staff members. Is there accountability, or is your church expecting too much? Has the time come to add a staff member? As you evaluate, consider the following:

- Ministers and staff members should be held accountable. Without becoming heavy-handed, church councils should know how those employed by the church spend their time.
- Ministers should be available to people in their church and in the community, especially when there are special circumstances. That will help them connect with the people they preach to on Sundays.
- Ministers and councils must decide together on the priorities of their churches. Ministers should not be allowed to “fly solo”—to decide on their own what’s most important at a particular time in the life of the congregation.
- Ministers should try to get acquainted with the members of their church. Once a minister is known as someone who cares about the people in the church and community, his or her preaching will connect, and even a not-so-good sermon can shine.

In some churches both ministers and members are hurting. Some ministers feel misunderstood and overworked, and some church members feel neglected or ignored. Perhaps the time is now to take a closer look at the role of the pastor, the needs of the members, and the challenges and opportunities facing the 21st-century church. ■

—Art Schooneveld

IT IS DIFFICULT TO COMPARE the expectations and role of a pastor 30 years ago or more with the expectations and role of a pastor today.

Even though a pastor's calling continues to highlight core activities such as preaching, teaching, visitation, and outreach, demands and expectations have changed considerably.

As far as ministers and congregations go, there is an increasingly wide range of opinion as to the precise expectations and role of a pastor. Some of this gets articulated formally, and some remains informal and unwritten, though powerfully at work in a given community.

We welcome Rev. Schoonveld's endorsement of staff ministry! The wide range of ministry tasks and rising standards often require gifts beyond what one person has received.

As well, in the past 30 years our immigrant denomination has woken up, smelled the culture, and heard the call to plant churches and revitalize existing congregations. Pastors across North America wonder whether to spend more time with shut-ins or more time interacting with seekers at the corner Tim Horton's or Starbucks.

Technological changes have been huge and, for all the benefits, have also demanded enormous amounts of time and energy from pastors and churches.

How and with whom to connect—those are real questions!

Changing Expectations

Expectations for the pastor's spouse, and corresponding career demands, have also changed immensely. What may congregations today expect of their pastor and spouse, and how might we acknowledge appropriately what seem at times to be competing values of church and home? Stories abound of pastors stingy with family for the sake of the church and pastors stingy with the church for the sake of family.

During the past 30 years, "family systems thinking" has resonated in the halls of seminary and church as a helpful perspective. Thinking systemically, pastors learn that their role in the church has as much to do with their emotional response to people and situations as it does with reporting an impressive amount of visitation. Being calm and courageous and finding creative ways to stay relationally connected to people in the midst of anxiety becomes a key objective for the systems-sensitive pastor.

Now to the questions: Are ministers too busy? Are ministers choosing to avoid some of the work they do not prefer? Are they simply hiding behind the veil of being "too busy" when in fact they are underachieving?

The answer to all of those questions is the same: yes and no. Some ministers work far too much, and some work far too little. And there are those who work much, but not on point. But this is not a new phenomenon—it was just as true years ago.

Sometimes congregations and pastors expect too much of themselves and of each other. And too much of even a good thing is simply that: too much.

One of the fine points Schoonveld makes is that ministers do not have a monopoly on being exceptionally or

excessively busy. People who work full-time and then volunteer countless hours to use their gifts for ministry can be very, very busy. And of course there are also many church members who underachieve, unwilling to use their gifts for the well-being of the body.

There is room here for both pastors and congregations to review priorities, to engage fully, and to identify and avoid excess and lack. In this regard, we note that C.S. Lewis once said, "Only lazy people work hard. By lazily abdicating the essential work of deciding and directing, establishing values and setting goals . . . we find ourselves trying to satisfy different demands . . . none of which is essential to our vocation."

As to pastors, Schoonveld identifies four key dynamics: (1) accountability, (2) availability, (3) the relational character of ministry, and (4) the need for pastors and church councils to develop job descriptions jointly. We agree that there needs to be a gracious, candid, ongoing conversation between pastors and councils, one which identifies formal and informal expectations and assesses which of those are healthy, helpful, and need to be honored.

Clarity is a worthy and essential goal. ■

—Norm Thomasma and
Cecil Van Nijenhuis



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Rev. Norm Thomasma is director of Pastor-Church Relations for the CRC.



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Already But Not Yet: Embracing the Challenges of Diversity

The 2011 Multiethnic Conference was a joyful celebration of diversity and a fervent call to further racial reconciliation in the Christian Reformed Church.

As always, the biennial conference was held in conjunction with the opening days of synod.

The conference theme was "Already But Not Yet: Embracing the Emerging Challenges of Diversity."

Eighty-six participants came from across the United States and Canada, representing many different ethnicities, including Africans, African Americans, Anglos, Chinese, Koreans, Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.

Ministry Associate Shiao Chong, a member of the planning committee, said, "We have made



Author George Yancey: "Racism is first and foremost a spiritual problem."

a lot of progress in the denomination, but we recognize that it's not the 1990s anymore—we're in a new reality and there are new challenges."

Conference workshops addressed some of those emerging challenges:

- bridging gaps between new immigrants and established people of color;
- bringing out the voice of young people of color;
- the themes of the Belhar Confession: unity, justice, and reconciliation;
- diversity in leadership.

The keynote speaker for the event was George Yancey, author of several books, including *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* and *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility*.

Yancey said the solution to racism and disunity has to come from the Christian church.

Multiethnic conference participants in worship



PHOTOS BY KAREN HUTTENGA



Graduate student Rachel Watson: "God may be calling me back to the CRC."

"Racism is first and foremost a spiritual problem, and not a social problem," he said. "We talk so often about how we are different, but let's talk about what ties us together. We have more in common than differences."

Just because there are multi-racial churches does not mean that the problem of racism is solved, he said. "We really have not seriously dealt with it in the church. . . . Part of loving one another is to truly understand one another."

At a workshop on Saturday, a panel of young people shared their thoughts on racial reconciliation within the CRC.

"Too often people have to hide their differences to feel accepted within the church," said panel member Lauren Harrison, from Warrensville Heights, Ohio. She shared that she often feels uncomfortable being the only person of color among church and school peers. "Trying to find your place within the church is very hard, but those hard, uncomfortable moments need to happen," she said.

Panelists said they sometimes perceived the CRC to be an "old white men's church." Steve Kabetu, denominational coordinator of Race Relations for the CRC in

Canada and panel moderator, encouraged the young people to make their voices heard: "We need your voices to speak a little louder [in the CRC]. . . . Are you waiting to be invited, or are you going to participate?"

Rev. Daniel Mendez, from Long Beach, Calif., spoke on leadership and race. Current thinking about leadership too often contributes to racialized dynamics, he said, but real leadership is about being our brother's keeper. "We should be thoughtful of all others and include them in our leadership development activities," he said.

Conference participants were enthusiastic about the experience.

"This conference opened my mind on the many things I can do in my church and the many things I can share with my neighbors," said Jonas Cruz of San Marcos, Calif., a new Christian who attended with five others from Iglesia Camino al Cielo CRC.

"This conference is a great asset to the denomination," said Joshua Amazechi, a recent graduate of Calvin Theological

Seminary. "It provides opportunity for the denomination to reflect on what it means to be a Christian community, to move into the future, and to assess where we are as a covenant community."

Graduate student Rachel Watson, from Chicago, said the conference came at a pivotal moment for her, a time when she was ready to leave a denomination in which she felt she wasn't needed.

She feels that God may be calling her back to the CRC: "Events like this are tremendously powerful. You really never know who you're going to have things in common with. This is a pivotal moment for me."

The Multiethnic Conference took place as Synod 2011 prepared to debate proposals that would increase ethnic diversity in senior administrative positions in the denomination (see page 38).

"This conference has been relevant to the times that we're experiencing in the life of our denomination," Rev. Esteban Lugo, director of Race Relations for the

CRC, told gathered conferees. "The present state of racial reconciliation in the CRCNA is at a crossroads. In this instance, either we will move forward in becoming God's diverse and unified community . . . or we will remain stagnant."

Rev. Peter Borgdorff, CRCNA executive director emeritus, explained the process that the report would go through as it comes before synod. He cautioned the group not to think of the report's review by synod as a win-lose, all-or-nothing situation.

"This report is a step in the history of our development. I don't know how big a step it will be . . . but I still have a deep, abiding trust that through synod's deliberations we'll be challenging one another to think more deeply and act more justly," he said. "Through the Spirit we will not abandon one another, but instead learn from each other."

Lugo said, "Ultimately, is it a question of maintaining power and privilege within the dominant culture? It's not so much that you don't look like me; it's more of an issue of 'You know what? This is mine, I have power, I have control of this, and I don't want that to be diminished.'"

After Lugo's talk, conferees sang "We Shall Overcome," then walked across campus to meet synod delegates face to face.

"We're delighted to have been invited here," Rev. Emmett Harrison, chair of the Multiethnic Conference committee, told synod delegates. "In the spirit of Pentecost, it is God who intervenes and ultimately directs us."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Rev. Emmett Harrison to Synod 2011 delegates: "We're delighted to have been invited here."



NEWS

SYNOD 2011

Proceed with Caution: A Road Guide to Synod 2011

Like traffic in a construction zone, Synod 2011 moved forward carefully and cautiously—making slow progress on some issues, but drawing to a stop on others.

Delegates were deliberative, taking their time for thorough debate, an accomplishment all the more impressive considering their heavy agenda and limited time.

Their debates remained healthy, at times heated but never angry. No one pointed fingers; no one raised his or her voice.

Close votes on several issues showed a Christian Reformed Church not so much divided as in healthy tension. The same delegates urging synod ahead on some issues rode the brakes on others.



Rev. Henry Vanderbeek: “I appreciate the effort to promote unity by revising our creeds and confessions.”



Synod 2011 News Team

With webcasts, press releases, articles on websites, and the magazine you hold in your hands, the news team had Synod 2011 covered from beginning to end.

The team included (back, l-r): Henry Hess and Gayla Postma; (middle, l-r): Tim Postuma, Jonathan Wilson, Ryan Struyk, and Dan Postma; (front) Roxanne Van Farowe.

Missing from the photo are Karen Huttenga, photographer, who was taking the photo, and *Banner* editor Rev. Bob DeMoor, who was pretending to have been raptured. —Gayla R. Postma

Synod 2011 saw green lights, stop signs, detours, and rough pavement, but also the promise of a smoother road ahead.

Green Lights

Though it took a long time for the light to change, Synod 2011 gave a green light to revised translations of the Belgic Confession, Canons of Dort, and Heidelberg Catechism—translations we now hold in common with the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Not all delegates were happy with the reduced use of male pronouns referring to God or the use of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible in the translations, but eventually the revisions received approval (p. 32).

Allowing baptized covenant children to take part in communion before making a public profession of faith was also given the go-ahead, subject to the practice of local churches.

Delegates stressed the importance of faith formation that includes a public profession of faith, but said children may participate in the Lord's Supper as a step in that faith formation (p. 34).

Synod 2011 also affirmed the importance of infant baptism in the Christian Reformed Church, calling it an “indispensible gift” (p. 35).

It noted that baptism needs to happen only once in a person's life, even if it happens in another denomination. To that end, Synod 2011 affirmed that members from

the Roman Catholic Church do not have to be rebaptized, a statement that caused dismay for some delegates (p. 45).

Proceed with Caution

Synod 2011 did not move as fast through diversity issues as some would have liked, but it did travel ahead. In a very close vote, delegates voted to set a goal that 25 percent of top administrative positions in the denomination would be filled by persons of ethnic-minority backgrounds.

Some expressed fears of “token hiring,” while others said the Korean community, the largest ethnic minority group in the CRC,



Rev. John Witvliet: Age- and ability-appropriate faith is what all congregations should be fostering.

did not have much participation in the final report. So an expanded task group will work on some of the recommendations synod did not adopt (p. 38).

Detour

The proposed Covenant for Office-bearers failed to reach its desired destination, instead being sent back to its study committee for more work.

After six years and two study committees, the detour was met with great frustration by those eager to have a new document replace the CRC's current Form of Subscription.

Fears that the new document requires less defense of the Reformed confessions and less accountability from signers caused delegates to ask that it be worked on one more year (p. 36).

Stop Signs

Synod 2011 put up several stop signs this year. A request for a new study on biblical teachings regarding homosexuality met one of those stop signs after a spirited debate and a close vote (p. 40).

Infant dedication met another stop sign, when Synod 2011 declared the practice inconsistent with the Reformed confessions (p. 35).

And Synod 2011 also put up a stop sign to a request to raise *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* to confessional status (p. 33).

Delegates also discussed at length the writings by two Calvin College professors regarding human origins, but declined to make any official declarations on the matter, deciding instead to wait for a Calvin College committee on academic freedom to report its findings (p. 37).

Rough Pavement

Synod 2011 hit stretches of rough pavement as delegates dealt with



PHOTOS BY KAREN HUTTENGA

Rev. Stephen M. Hasper: "It's not that we have no position [on evolution]. We have the *Belgic Confession* and the *Canons of Dort*, and they speak quite eloquently to it."

painful issues surrounding the CRC Board of Trustees' request for the resignation of the CRC's executive director after an independent performance review.

Synod lamented the hurt experienced by all parties involved and gave thanks for the gifts used in service to the church by those same people (p. 40).

Synod approved changes to the ministers' pension plan that will raise the normal retirement age for pastors from 65 to 66, change the cost of spousal benefits, and increase the contributions churches must make to the plan (p. 47).

Though we look forward with excitement to next year's youth summit, asked for and planned by young adults of the Christian Reformed Church, it may come with its own share of bumps in the road (p. 33).

Some of this year's youth representatives were not afraid to challenge synod—some disagree-

ing with the decision regarding a new study on homosexuality, and another commenting on what he perceived as a lot of fear.

Smoother Road Ahead

Every construction zone eventually ends with the promise of a smoother road, and Synod 2011 saw promises of that as well.

Synod celebrated with joy the appointment of Rev. Moses Chung as the new director of Christian Reformed Home Missions, surrounding him and his family in prayer (p. 42).

Delegates approved the appointment of Rev. Joel Boot as interim executive director of the CRC, and heard his testimony that the state of the Christian Reformed Church is good (p. 31). And synod

established a new task force to find ways to improve the administrative structure of the denomination (p. 41).

Delegates from the CRC and the Reformed Church in America celebrated together the great amount of ministry being done in partnership with the promise of more to come (p. 30).

No doubt we will continue to experience detours, stop signs, and bumpy pavement, but much of the work done by Synod 2011 bodes well for our continued travel on the road of building God's kingdom.



Gayla R. Postma
is news editor
for *The Banner*.



Synod 2011 Elects Experienced Executive

Synod 2011 elected an executive committee with a combined total of 23 synods under its belt. The officers were (l-r): Rev. Bert Slofstra, first clerk, Rev. James Dekker, president, Rev. George Vink, vice president, and Rev. Sheila Holmes, second clerk.

Only Holmes had previously served on the executive, as vice president of Synod 2009. The other three had all been nominated for the executive at previous synods but not elected.

"Until now it was a case of 'always a bridesmaid, never a bride,'" joked Vink.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

RCA and CRC Synods Meet in Historic Joint Session

For the first time ever, the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) held a joint session of their respective synods

"Steps have been slowly coming together since first we went apart," said Rev. James Dekker, president of the CRC synod. The RCA and the CRC separated in 1857 but in recent years have been working together in several ways.

"This is like a family reunion at long last," said Rev. Joel Boot, interim director of the CRC. "We celebrate the fact that we are closer now than we have been since 1857. For the glory of God and the good of the church and the world, I give thanks to God."

Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, retiring general secretary of the RCA, pointed out a few distinctions between the denominations: "You [the CRC] are really a binational church in a full way. . . . You're very cohesive—you put



KAREN HUTTENGA

your mind to something and get it done. . . . The RCA is more diverse and has a deep ecumenical involvement."

Delegates from both synods heard several examples of the two denominations' work together.

Church planters Revs. Nate and Andrea DeWard spoke about the Kingdom Enterprise Zone, a joint church multiplication endeavor the denominations share.

"We know that we are on the same team," said Andrea DeWard.



(Above) Rev. Joel Boot: "This is like a family reunion at long last. We are closer now than we have been since 1857."

(Left) Delegates process to the Calvin College chapel for combined worship.

"We're bringing together the best of our resources.

We're coming together to be a witness to Christ's unity."

Mark Rice, director of Faith Alive Christian Resources, the CRC's publishing house, spoke about the shared publishing work of the denominations. He said the partnership works because the denominations have "kindred hearts."

The delegates of the two synods together adopted new translations of the Reformed confessions, a project shared by the two denominations. The translations had been approved earlier by each synod individually. Ratification of the proposal came by way of singing together a hearty chorus of "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."

Rev. Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, told delegates, "The world is hungry for models of healing and reconciliation," Nyomi said. "We pray that the RCA and the CRC will be one so that the world may believe the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we all serve."

Delegates then filed in a procession to the college chapel for a joint worship service that included a communion celebration.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



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Synod's Oldest and Youngest Delegates

Elder Cornelius Vander Kam, Classis Georgetown, who is a sprightly 81, was the most elderly delegate at this year's synod, and elder Katie Ritsema-Roelofs was the youngest delegate, at 27 years old.

Ritsema-Roelofs was also the youngest delegate at Synod 2009, when she was 25.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Elders Cornelius Vander Kam and Katie Ritsema-Roelofs

Synod 2011 by the Numbers

Oldest delegate:	81
Youngest delegate:	27
Average age of minister delegates:	51
Average age of elder delegates:	63
Percentage of first-time delegates:	65
Percentage of female delegates:	12
Percentage of ethnic minority delegates:	14

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod 2011 Urged to 'Press On'

Synod 2011's service of prayer and praise, hosted by Madison Square Church of Grand Rapids, Mich., had a Pentecost focus on the Holy Spirit.

The church led delegates in a service with the theme "Press On," based on Jesus being filled with the Spirit as he pressed on quietly with his healing work in Matthew 12.

"We were told when we were hosting this grand day that we could just be ourselves," said Laura Carpenter, the church's director of diversity. "We're going to beat the drums and dance—dance, worship, and praise."

Accompanied by piano and African drums, worshipers sang a lively medley of songs, including

a Nigerian song, "I Must Go with Jesus Anywhere."

Ministry Associate Joy Bon-nema, Madison's pastor of congregational life, prayed for synod and multiethnic conference participants: "For the work that has been done and the work that is ahead, we pray for a spirit of unity and perseverance."

As the service drew to a close, Rev. David Beelen, Madison's senior pastor, invited people to come forward to be anointed with oil on their foreheads and blessed. "God loves to work with humility, and simply going up to someone with your hands open is an act of humility," said Beelen.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Hears State of Church Address

This is my fifth day in office. I was told 'you're supposed to speak about the state of the church.' I don't think there is much I can say."

That was how Rev. Joel Boot, interim executive director of the Christian Reformed Church, started his address to Synod 2011.

In recounting the whirlwind of events of the previous weeks, he told delegates he wasn't even sure of the state of Joel Boot.

Boot had been planning to finish out his ministry career in the congregation he has served for 19 years. Instead, he now leads the denomination's administration for the next two years. His appointment comes on the heels of resignations of both the executive director and the director of denominational ministries in the past two months.

"God called," Boot told delegates. "He came to my door, kicked it off its hinges, and said, 'I have something in mind for you that you didn't know about.' It was unmistakable."

Boot said the Board of Trustees asked him to do three things: accomplish the business of the church as expected of the executive director, provide wise counsel and a healing presence for staff, and analyze the culture and organization to develop a thriving ministering community.

He paraphrased that for delegates as: do absolutely everything possible, perform miracles, and develop and display omniscience.

"I'm nervous. I'm scared. I'm uncertain. I'm uncomfortable," Boot said. "But I have begun to sense again the state of Joel Boot. I am not my own, but I belong body and soul, in life and death, to my faithful Lord and Savior. I have never in my life been as aware of being prayed for as the last two weeks. And then, in his grace, God sent me here this week."

"The 188 or so of you, and many devoted staff people, ... sacrificing your time and energy, opening your heart, available to God, enjoying this work, giving up vacation for [the equivalent of] a marathon council meeting of 70 hours ... if that doesn't say something about the state of the church, I don't know what does."

"It says, we belong to our faithful Lord and Savior, at home and here, church and classis, classis and synod. Next year, I may be able to add more detail, but I have never had more confidence than I have right now that the church, and we, are in God's hands. Therefore, the state of the church is great."

Delegates responded with a prolonged standing ovation.

—Gayla R. Postma



Rev. Joel Boot: "Next year, I may be able to add more detail, but the church, and we, are in God's hands. Therefore, the state of the church is great."



Synodical worship service at Madison Square CRC

Synod 2011 Approves Revised Translations of Confessions

Synod 2011 approved the proposed revisions to the translations of the Belgic Confession, Canons of Dort, and Heidelberg Catechism.

The revisions were done by a multid denominational committee composed of the Christian Reformed Church, Reformed Church in America (RCA), and Presbyterian Church (USA), focusing on reducing male pronouns for God and eliminating masculine references to humankind. When there were disagreements among the versions used by the various denominations, they referred to the original language of the confessions.

"I think it is profoundly significant when three Reformed denominations that have some significant differences were willing



Rev. Kenneth Baker: "I think it is profoundly significant when three Reformed denominations that have some significant differences were willing to engage in a process like this."

to engage in a process like this," said Rev. Kenneth Baker, Classis Kalamazoo.

Supporters said the translations were a step toward unity with the RCA. "I appreciate the

effort to promote unity by revising our creeds and confessions," said Rev. Henry Vander Beek, Classis Lake Superior.

However some delegates thought that common translations would not have much effect. "[Unity with the RCA] has never been an issue on asking for a new translation. I don't think we need to have a new translation—not for the purpose of unity," said Rev. Merlin Buwalda, Classis Thor napple Valley.

Several delegates questioned the use of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible in the new translations.

"We should not attempt to put words in [God's] mouth as it comes to his self-revelation," reasoned Rev. Aaron Vriesman, Classis Zeeland. "Ecumenical relations are great, but it is not worth biblical compromises."

Delegates were reminded that the NRSV is a synod-approved version of the Bible. "There are cautions raised about every translation that we approve as a CRC," said Rev. Lyle Bierma from Calvin Theological Seminary. "The NRSV is actually a more literal translation . . . and gives the reader a better sense of the original text."

"We are not approving a new translation of Scripture," explained Rev. Scott Hoeszee, seminary faculty adviser. "Let's not mix apples with oranges. We need to keep the lines clear here."

Rev. Henry Vander Beek, Classis Lake Superior, warned against "the trend to change language of Scripture to our desire to be current or more acceptable as a denomination."

Rev. Joseph Vanden Akker, Classis Minnkota, said, "The Bible liberally uses masculine pronouns for God. So if we're not going to follow the example of God, it seems we should have good reasons not to."



Rev. Henry Vander Beek warned against the trend to change language of Scripture in our desire to be current or more acceptable as a denomination.

Several classes (regional groups of churches) had asked synod not to pass the new translations. "While I commend the committee for all the work they have done, [many] churches are represented in the overtures against this," said elder Christine Vanderberg, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan. "I'm not sure that everyone here is ready to [approve the translations] yet."

After the CRC synod approved the translations, the translations were formally adopted in a joint session of both the CRC and RCA synods.

Synod 2011 also instructed Faith Alive Christian Resources to continue publishing the former versions of the confessions as long as economically feasible.

—Ryan Struyk



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Synod 2011 Youth Representatives

Seven young adults, ages 20 to 24, explained the viewpoints of the next generation at Synod 2011.

This year's youth representatives were (back row, l-r): Mark Eekhof, John Kloosterman, and Seth Adema; and (front row, l-r): Corey Van Huizen, Elizabeth Jennings, John Bentum, and Robert Van Lonkhuyzen.

"I'm excited in the direction that the denomination is going in listening to multiple voices," said Mark Eekhoff. "But there's still room to grow."

—Ryan Struyk



Amy Vander Vliet: "We share your passion."

Young Adults to Hold Triennial Summit

Christian Reformed young adults will hold a summit every three years, overlapping with the synods of those years, starting in 2012.

It is intended as an "institutional pathway for young adult input" in the CRC.

"We recognize we're asking a lot, but we think we share your passion," said Amy Vander Vliet, a member of the leadership team behind the summit and herself a two-time youth representative to synod. "We know we're pretty transient. We want to have a spot where we're all together, connected to each other and connected to the church."

The summit proposal noted that structural barriers remain to young adult participation in the CRC. The summit is intended to establish a visible youth voice on issues important to the CRC, spark interest in church government among youths, provide mentoring to young leaders, and help churches show young adults "the relevance of involvement in an organized Christian community."

"I speak in favor with my whole heart," said Rev. Jeffery Klingenberg, Classis Hamilton. "[Young adults] want to be involved, and to be quite honest, they're waiting for us to move over and let them be leaders."

The inaugural summit will take place in 2012 in Ancaster, Ontario, under the guidance of the Young Adult Leadership Team of the CRC's Leadership Exchange.

—Dan Postma

Synod Gives Belhar Discussion More Direction



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Synod 2011 instructed the denomination's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) to "foster a balanced denominationwide discussion on the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession."

Next year's synod will decide whether to accept the Belhar Confession as the Christian Reformed Church's fourth confessional standard.

Synod was responding to an overture (request) from Classis Heartland. According to grounds for the overture,

Rev. Timothy Toeset: "We believe that the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee will deal with this appropriately."

a more balanced discussion is needed because official CRC communications about the Belhar have focused on promoting it, rather than considering its "merits and liabilities." Synod did not include those grounds in its instruction.

Several delegates observed that there has been

ample time for congregations to study the Belhar, and now little time remains.

"We tried to leave this instruction open-ended," said Rev. Timothy Toeset, Classis Pacific Northwest and reporter for the committee that considered the overture. "We believe that the EIRC has heard [the] concerns and will deal with this appropriately."

Synod 2009 proposed adopting the Belhar in 2012 following a three-year study period.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

No Confessional Status for Contemporary Testimony

Our *World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*, first adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in the 1980s as a testimony, will not be raised to the status of a confession (alongside the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism).

Classis British Columbia North-West, a regional group of churches, had asked synod to revise the role of the testimony. "Giving the *Contemporary Testimony* the status of confession would acknowledge the role it already plays in much of the denomination," the classis stated.

However, Synod 2011 delegates decided that with the CRC actively debating the status of the Belhar Confession, the denomination already shows considerable "confessional vitality," and that 2011-2012 is not a good time to consider promoting the *Contemporary Testimony*.

—Dan Postma

New Hymnal Will Not Include Reformed Confessions

Synod 2011 said the new hymnal being produced by Faith Alive, *Lift Up Your Hearts*, will not include the full text of the Reformed confessions as originally planned.

Because of its smaller size, the hymnal will be easier to use and handle without including the confessions. Removing the confessions also increases the hymnal's potential to be used by other denominations.

Synod noted the easy access to the confessions online and in other publications. They will also be printed in a separate volume that can be used in a classroom, church, or home.

—Ryan Struyk

Public Profession of Faith No Longer a Requirement for Communion

Baptized children in the Christian Reformed Church will now be eligible for full participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper without having previously made public profession of faith.

Delegates adopted the proposal that "all baptized members who come with age- and ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to the Lord's Table."

The CRC's Faith Formation Committee, in its fourth consecutive year appearing before synod, said their aim has been to encourage in all churches intentional, deep participation in and integration of faith formation—including vital profession of faith.

Age- and ability-appropriate faith is what all congregations should be fostering, noted Rev. John Witvliet, chair of the Faith Formation Committee. Appropriate faith "fits us wherever we are in facing life's circumstances," he said.

Rev. Jack Van de Hoef, Classis Eastern Canada, said, "Synod 2010 went in the direction that profession of faith is not required for participation at the table, but that



PHOTOS BY KAREN HUTTENGA

Rev. Jack Van de Hoef: "Part of forming faith is being welcomed to the Lord's table."

participation in the Lord's Supper is part of forming faith. We're talking here about stages of forming faith, of which being welcomed to the Lord's table is an important aspect."

"I'm excited about welcoming children to the Lord's table," said elder Carl Smits, Classis Illiana.

The Faith Formation members wrote, "The committee has been struck by the deep sense of urgency felt throughout the denomination over issues related

to faith formation. Part of this, we sense, is fueled by concern for young adults who are leaving the church. Another part, we sense, is fueled by a renewed commitment in several Christian traditions not merely to grow churches but also to form disciples of Jesus."



Elder Chad Werkhoven: "Profession of faith ought to be one of the biggest opportunities for joy a congregation has."

Delegates also expressed a desire that the step of public profession of faith not be diminished by this decision.

Elder Chad Werkhoven, Classis Columbia, said, "We certainly need to clear up misconceptions about profession of faith—that it's only for 'super-spiritual' kids, or for those who've had radical conversion experiences. Profession of faith ought to be one of the biggest opportunities for joy a congregation has."

The decision by Synod 2011 will not bind churches to allow children to partake in the Lord's

Faith Formation Mandate Extended

On the heels of releasing significant work on infant baptism, infant dedication, and children at the Lord's Supper, members of the denomination's Faith Formation Committee have been asked by Synod 2011 for one additional year of service.

The committee was asked to spend the additional year "shepherding the denomination" in its movement toward stronger faith formation practices and developing models for "promoting continued learning, reflection, and training on the topic of faith formation and discipleship."

The committee will now work on coordinating the faith formation efforts of the Christian Reformed Church's many denominational ministries and agencies, and will make its final report to Synod 2013. —Dan Postma

Synod 2015 Headed to Iowa

Synod 2011 delegates approved a proposal to hold Synod 2015 at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

The last time synod was held at Dordt College was 2003.

Next year's synod will be at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario, then synod will return to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., for 2013 and 2014.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Supper but, rather, allows for diversity of local practice within a standard principle. The CRC mandates that celebration of the sacraments is always to be done under the guidance of church elders.

All the resources from the Faith Formation Committee are available on the denomination's website at www.crcna.org.

—Dan Postma

Infant Dedication Not Consistent with Reformed Confessions

Soon after endorsing a 10,000-word affirmation of covenant infant baptism, Synod 2011 declared that infant dedication is not consistent with the Reformed confessions.

It said that pastors should “refrain from leading rituals of infant or child dedication in public worship services.”

A study committee examined the whole spectrum of Protestant

churches and found a wide range of dedication practices, from ceremonies resembling “dry baptisms” to rituals chiefly focused on parents and their role in instructing their children.

The CRC will instead stick with baptisms administered with water in the name of the one triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Synod 2011 advised CRC pastors who are asked to facilitate infant dedications to—while appropriately celebrating the child’s birth or adoption, and pastorally encouraging faithful upbringing in the Lord—instead



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Rev. John Luth: “The Bible teaches infant baptism and this is our practice.”

focus on expressing a biblical understanding of the meaning and benefits of covenant baptism.

“This principle is not forcing infant baptism on anyone,” said Rev. Jacob Van de Hoef. “We’re just not going to have two practices, infant baptism and infant dedication.”

The proposal to discourage infant dedication passed easily. Rev. John Luth, Classis Alberta North, described the CRC’s position as “sensitive, positive, and helpful. It’s OK and it’s healthy to say that this is what we as a church believe—the Bible teaches infant baptism, and this is our practice.”

—Dan Postma

Calvin College Arena Gets Canadian Flag

Synod 2011 had a minor flag flap when synod president Rev. James Dekker, who lives in St. Catharines, Ontario, noted that only an American flag hung from the rafters in the arena at Calvin College where synod was meeting.

“I was surprised that Calvin College did not have room in its budget for a Canadian flag,”

Rev. James Dekker and his new maple leaf tie

quipped Dekker. So Dekker contacted his Member of Parliament, who also happens to attend his church, who sent a Canadian flag by courier.

After Rev. Bruce Adema, the CRC’s director of Canadian ministries, presented the flag to Henry De Vries, Calvin’s vice president of administration, it was hung next to the American flag, where it was still dwarfed in size.



PHOTOS BY KAREN HUTTENGA

Calvin College received a Canadian flag as a gift for synod.

Referring to the fact that Synod 2012 will be held in Canada, De Vries said: “My comfort is that next year I expect the size of those two flags to be reversed.”

Later in the week, De Vries reciprocated the gift-giving by presenting Dekker with a red and white tie with the Canadian maple leaf.

—Dan Postma and Ryan Struyk

CRC Affirms Commitment to Baptism

Synod 2011 delegates affirmed and endorsed a landmark reflection on the “indispensable gift” of the sacrament of baptism.

The document, from the denomination’s Faith Formation Committee, said, “In a time of significant change it is wise for all of us—working together as a denomination and in partnership with our ecumenical partners worldwide—to discern and then promote biblically faithful sacramental practices.”

The new guide, titled “Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith,” is carefully structured in small, digestible sections, and is targeted at teachers, parents, church councils, or small groups studying faith formation and the sacraments.

Rev. Jacob Van de Hoef, Classis Eastern Canada, said, “May that document live and not collect dust.”

“Affirming Baptism and Forming Faith” is already translated into Korean and is supplemented with a study guide and sermon series suggestions.

—Dan Postma



Proposed Covenant for Officebearers Sent Back for Further Study

After six years and two study committees, the proposed replacement to the Form of Subscription has still not satisfied synod. Synod 2011 delegates voted to send the document back to the study committee for a seventh year of work.

The Form of Subscription (FOS) is the document that all Christian Reformed Church officebearers must sign to affirm their agreement with the creeds, confessions, and teachings of the church.

In recent years the document, which was originally written in 1618, has fallen into disuse in some churches because some officebearers have reservations about signing it.

So Synod 2005 assigned a committee the task of coming up with a new version, but it was rejected in 2008.

A new committee has been working on it since then, keeping synod apprised of its work each year.

Synod 2011 greeted the proposed Covenant for Officebearers with spirited debate.



PHOTOS BY KAREN HUTTENGA

Gaylen Byker: "This is a watershed point for the CRC and Calvin College. It would be a major mistake to adopt the proposed Covenant in its current form."

of Subscription] clips our wings to some extent. I have long, long felt that the wording is negative, defensive, overly restrictive, about preservation. I think it casts a negative pall on the confessions themselves. I see the proposed Covenant as more positive."

Much of the debate centered on the perception that the new document

requires less defense of the Reformed confessions and less accountability from signers than the current form.

Representatives of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary and several other synod delegates advocated for more study and a new draft.

Gaylen Byker, president of Calvin College, said: "This is a watershed point for the CRC and Calvin College. It would be a major mistake to adopt the proposed Covenant in its current form."

Byker warned that the "agree-not-to-disagree tone of the Covenant" is how other previously Christian universities lost their Christian character. "If the CRC is not going to embrace the particularity of Reformed confessional tradition as a gift and a strength, then we might as well fold up shop and head for the non-denominational evangelical church down the street."

Rev. John Cooper, professor of philosophical theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, also argued forcefully against the draft. "I like [Rev. Tim] Keller, I like the fact that he can make *Time* magazine, that Calvinism makes *Time* magazine as something that young people are taking seriously. And just at that time, we're backing off on our enthusiasm in our willingness to defend it?"

Rev. James Dekker, chair of the committee that wrote the proposed Covenant for Officebearers, responded: "We were very diligent to respond to the warnings, caveats that were made on the floor of [previous] synods. We've visited 45 of the 47 classes. It is only within the last months, because of the difficulty here at the college, that some of this has again begun to surface. I don't think that a bad year in one place is a good time to make a retreat to something the church had said we had to progress from."

Synod 2011 asked the study committee to come back in 2012 with a new draft that includes more positive, declarative commitments to teach, defend, and actively promote the confessions and Reformed doctrine of the CRCNA.

"It's really important we get this thing right, and I respect the work that's been done, but if it takes another year, that's the price we pay," said Rev. John Luth, Classis Alberta North.

At least Rev. Kenneth Baker, Classis Kalamazoo, took the long



Rev. Daniel Zylstra: "To me this is a document that speaks clearly and beautifully. It's a document that resonates very well."

view on assigning a seventh year of study.

Quipped Baker, "We've heard a lot of talk about people's fathers and grandfathers having signed the original [Form]. Perhaps in future years our own grandchildren will say, 'My grandparents worked on this committee.'"

—Dan Postma

President Rev. James Dekker, after problems with the electronic voting system postponed a vote: "You know what to pray about over supper, right?"

"To me this is a document that speaks clearly and beautifully," said Rev. Daniel Zylstra, Classis Quinte. "It reminds me very much of the language in the *Contemporary Testimony*. It's a document that resonates very well."

Rev. Ed Laarman, Central Plains, agreed. "I think the current [Form

CRC Position on Creation and Science Remains Unchanged

Synod 2011 declined to make any official declarations in response to the writings of two Calvin College professors on issues of human origins but, rather, decided to wait for a report from the college.

"There need to be boundaries, but we are also concerned about creating an atmosphere that does not stifle those around us from doing their work with all their curiosity," said Rev. Peter Jonker, Classis Grand Rapids East.

An overture (request) came to synod from Classis Central Plains to declare part of a 1991 report the official position of the CRC on creation and science.

"We need to say something because the perception is that the denomination believes in evolu-

tion. I have had to say in council meetings and in interactions with those outside the denomination—no we don't," said Rev. John Gorter, Classis Central Plains.

Elder Chad Werkhoven, Classis Columbia, focused on the proposal being a first step. "I know it's short and I know it's incomplete, but it's a starting point. We have a responsibility here."

However, Synod 2011 found the proposed section "inadequate" as an official position statement.

"The issue is whether or not what is stated in [the 1991 report] ... can do the job that we want it to do," said Rev. Dan Gritter, Classis Grand Rapids South.

Rev. Scott E. Hoezee, Calvin Theological Seminary faculty adviser at synod, said, "To make



Rev. John Gorter: "We need to say something because the perception is that the denomination believes in evolution."

something an official position of the church is a big deal, so to lift out a section of a 20-year-old report and to make it an official position of the church is very dangerous."

Rev. Stephen M. Hasper, Classis Georgetown, reiterated the church's current position. "We have the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, and they speak quite eloquently to it. It's not that we have no position," he said.

After an extended debate, synod decided to limit its response to requiring Calvin College to send to synod its report on the balance of academic freedom and the church's confessions.

—Ryan Struyk

Continuing Education for Pastors Encouraged

Synod 2011 expressed strong encouragement for pastors to continue their education while serving but did not impose mandatory requirements.

Rev. Kenneth Baker, Classis Kalamazoo, cited the importance

of "not just the pastor him- or herself making the case for time away [to study], but others encouraging and stating the value of it."

Synod also approved the addition of a line item on continuing education in the CRC Letter of Call, issued to pastors when called by a church.

Some delegates wanted synod to go a step further and create a requirement for pastors.

"I'm wondering why pastors should be any different [than

social workers] and not need some continuing education," said elder Gerald Schepers, Classis Northern Michigan. Rev. David Koll, the denomination's director of candidacy, noted that most professions in North America have mandatory continuing education.

"If we as churches would take leadership in taking a mandate for continuing education, it would show leadership," said Rev. John Luth, Classis Alberta North.

Koll did not completely rule out mandatory education in the future. "Do all you can to encourage. For now, let's at least take some steps to move synod ahead. It wasn't the judgment of the Candidacy Committee that this was the right time to bring a mandatory proposal."

—Ryan Struyk

Elder Gerald Schepers: "I'm wondering why pastors should be any different and not need some continuing education."

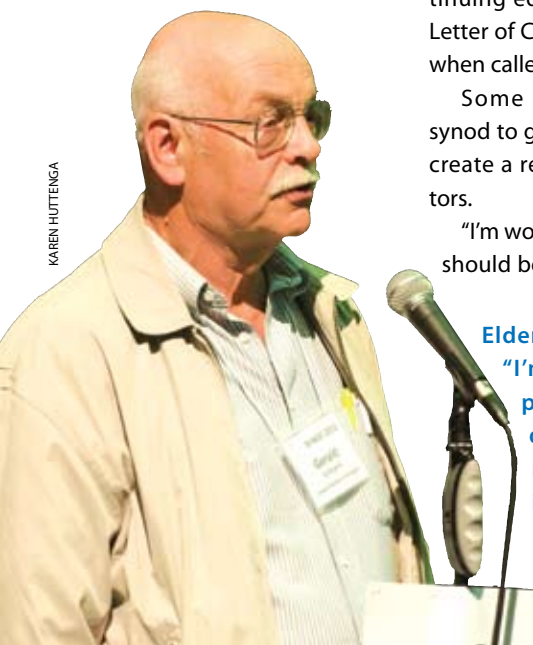
Rules Changed for Pastors Loaned to Other Denominations

Synod 2011 has removed the requirement that pastors serving outside of the denomination must try to bring their churches into the Christian Reformed Church "as a matter of duty."

Instead synod said that the pastors should see their situation as an opportunity to encourage the church to affiliate with the CRC.

"The intent is that they would use their opportunity as Reformed leaders to impact that group and possibly bring them into the denomination," explained Rev. Timothy Ouwinga, Classis Minnesota.

—Ryan Struyk



KAREN HUTTENG

CRC Takes More Steps Toward Diversity

With much debate and a close vote, Synod 2011 made several decisions with the intent of helping Christian Reformed Church leadership become more ethnically diverse.

Delegates voted 97-86 to set a goal that 25 percent of top administrative leadership positions in the denomination be filled by persons of ethnic-minority backgrounds. Synod also approved measures to encourage "equitable diversity practices" in "hiring, training, communication, and management processes."

However, in response to concerns raised by classes (regional groups of churches) and by a CRC ministry agency, synod mandated formation of an expanded task force to continue work of the current Diversity in Leadership Planning Group (DLPG).

Speaking in favor of the 25 percent hiring goal, elder Fronse Pellebon Smith, Classis Holland, said, "We cannot walk the marathon. We already started too late. . . . We need to rise up together and see each other as equals."



KAREN HUTTENG

Synod 2011 Ethnic Advisers

(L-r) Thurman Rivers, Alice Rivers, and Gavy Tran served as ethnic advisers at Synod 2011. Thurman and Alice Rivers returned after serving in 2010 also.

Thurman Rivers expressed a positive view of diversity at synod: "I think synod is getting [more diverse]," he said. "Pretty soon they won't need ethnic advisers." The number of ethnic advisers is down from seven in 2010. —Ryan Struyk



Elder Fronse Pellebon Smith: "We already started too late. . . . We need to rise up together and see each other as equals."

Elder David Raakman, Classis Toronto, agreed. "Let's not walk, let's run. This is a critical moment. We need to do something, and do something now."

But several delegates protested that the goal was unnecessary.

"My fear is that we run the risk of making minorities feel token," said elder Katie Ritsema-Roelofs, Classis Hackensack. "I'm a minority in every way at this synod, being young, a woman, and an ethnic minority. I would never want to feel that I got a position of leadership because of the color of my skin."

Elder Tae Kim, Classis Greater Los Angeles, stated that many in his classis felt left out of the process of developing leadership diversity goals. "My heart is torn. . . . This is such an important, sensitive topic that if we do it the wrong way, I think there is a fear of it being tokenism. Going quickly may not be a good thing to do, because this is a sensitive matter."

Rev. Alvern Gelder, Classis Atlantic North-east, emphasized that the 25 percent hiring goal is not legally binding, but meant to spur on efforts that are already in place. "We speak of goal, not quota. These are things that have already been adopted, but these goals are put in front of us with intentionality," he said.

The senior positions referred to include 36 people, and five of those positions are currently



Elder Katie Ritsema-Roelofs: "I'm a minority in every way at this synod, being young, a woman, and an ethnic minority. I would never want to feel that I got a position of leadership because of the color of my skin."



Elder Tae Kim: "My heart is torn. I think there is a fear of it being tokenism. Going quickly may not be a good thing."

held by persons of ethnic minority.

The diversity in leadership task group was formed in 2009 when that synod became concerned that racial minorities were being excluded from a senior staff decision-making body, the CRC's Ministries Leadership Team (MLT), due to restructuring.

Synod declined to adopt the DLPG's entire report, however, responding to concerns raised that included "lack of clarity," a "top-down approach," a "mis-focused strategy," "lack of time for study and implementation," and (from Classis Pacific Hanmi) "representatives of the Korean community, the largest minority ethnic group in the CRCNA, were invisible and their voices inaudible in the report."

In response, synod instructed the Board of Trustees to appoint an expanded task force to "allow for input from a broader range of stakeholders." That expanded group will work on the recommendations that were not adopted by Synod 2011, including recommendations concerning the role of the director of Race Relations, the addition of measurable goals, and strategies for raising up diverse leaders at all levels of the church.

The new task force will report to Synod 2013.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

No Additional Rules for Separations of Pastors and Churches

Synod 2011 decided not to add any more regulations to the existing process governing how churches and pastors separate from each other.

One classis (regional group of churches) had asked synod to place a 16- to 18-month timetable on such separation procedures, and another had sought to make restorative healing processes mandatory.

"After the terms of the separation (such as severance, provision for counseling, and other support) are agreed upon, the urge to seek healing of relational wounds often dissipates," the latter request read.

Rev. Aaron Vriesman, Classis Zeeland, said, "I think that our Church Order could really use something like this."

But synod decided that existing regulations sufficiently cover both issues.

"We have a lot in place already to help us," said elder Andy de Ruyter, Classis B.C. North-West. "It's just a matter of identifying the problem early enough and using what we have in place."

—Dan Postma

Guidelines for Classis Meetings Remain the Same

Synod 2011 did not give permission for classes (regional groups of churches) to hold more *classis contracta* meetings. *Classis contracta* is an additional meeting on top of regularly scheduled meetings where not all the churches in a classis are represented.

Those meetings usually include a situation where only one issue, such as an examination of a candidate for ministry, needs to be handled.

Rev. Peter Jonker, Classis Grand Rapids East, explained the reasoning behind the proposal. "In the last six years, we've had 33 exams. We just don't have the time to get through everything on our agenda. It would give some flexibility to us to be able to do our business better."

Rev. Timothy Ouwinga said, "[The advisory committee's] sentiments are that this overture makes it a little too easy to have abbreviated classes—that it almost becomes a norm."

Synod voted to keep the guidelines the way they are.

—Ryan Struyk

No New Process to Change Confessions, Church Order

Synod 2011 decided to maintain the current process required to make substantial changes to the Reformed confessions and Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church, as laid out in Article 47 of the Church Order.

Classis Grand Rapids North (a regional group of churches) had requested that synod change the process to be similar to that used by the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (USA). Those churches require two-thirds of the classes (regions) to approve major changes to the confessions, Church Order, and liturgical forms, among other documents.

Some delegates supported the proposal. "We need to realize that there's a disconnect between what happens here and people in the pew thousands of miles away from here," said elder Chad Werkhoven, Classis Columbia.



Rev. Kathy Smith: "We deliberate all together so we can hear wisdom from one another."

KAREN HUTTENGA

But more delegates favored the current system.

Rev. Kathy Smith, Calvin Theological Seminary faculty adviser to synod, praised the effectiveness of the current process. "We come together to discuss and deliberate all together, not in our separate classes, but together, so we can hear the wisdom from one another."

—Ryan Struyk

Ministry Associate Wording Stays the Same

Synod 2011 upheld the current wording of Church Order Article 23 concerning ministry associates.

An overture (request) had come to synod asking for more clarity in the description of a ministry associate.

However, Rev. David Koll, the denomination's director of candidacy, said, "The current Church Order wording serves us well, and the flexibility that is there is help-

ful rather than harmful." Delegates agreed.

There have been a growing number of ministry associates in the denomination, and some are leading congregations alone. "The churches are finding many ways to use the position of ministry associate," said Koll.

"It's really quite something to watch what is happening in the CRC with the provision of leadership," said Rev. Dan Gritter, Classis Grand Rapids South. "There are a lot of men and women who are [becoming ministry associates], and there are many churches that are utilizing this wonderful way of serving in the CRC."

However, the specific conditions of these arrangements are often left to the discernment of synodical deputies.

—Ryan Struyk

Rev. Dan Gritter: "It's really quite something to watch what is happening in the CRC with the provision of leadership."



KAREN HUTTENGA

No New Study of Homosexuality

Following a spirited debate, Synod 2011 decided not to re-examine the Christian Reformed Church's biblical and theological position on homosexuality, unchanged since 1973.

Classis Grand Rapids East (a regional group of churches) had asked synod to appoint a study committee to consider new biblical and theological resources that have been published since the denomination's official stance was decided.

Delegates were starkly divided on the question.

"I hear a lot of words of fear, backed by the assumption that the position of the CRC on this issue will change," said Rev. Arthur De Bruyn, Classis Rocky Mountain.

Rev. Alvern Gelder, Classis Atlantic Northeast, went further: "We must stand boldly and not act out of fear. We can open the light of Scripture to all that is being done around us and know that Scripture is strong and firm."



Rev. Alvern Gelder: "We must stand boldly and not act out of fear."

Many delegates were not convinced by those arguments to strike a new study committee, or even to restate the denomination's existing position.



Elder Donald Kloosterhouse: "The Bible has not changed. We should not look for ways to twist God's Word to fit current thinking."

"The Bible has not changed," said elder Donald Kloosterhouse, Classis Zeeland. "We should not take an easy route by twisting, trying to look for ways to twist God's Word to fit the world, to fit current thinking."

In a 93 to 81 vote, synod decided not to appoint a study committee on the issue.

Yet a challenge from young adult representative John Kloosterman still faces the denomination as a whole as it continues to assert its position adopted in 1973.

"The CRC position on homosexuality must be one that we are extremely confident standing behind," said Kloosterman, a student at Calvin College. "It has to be able to speak to young adults for whom the position on homosexuality represents an opportunity to splinter away from the church."

—Dan Postma

Synod 2011 Deals with Executive Director Resignation, Honors Dykstra's Contribution

Synod 2011 dealt with the resignation of former executive director Rev. Jerry Dykstra, and also honored him for his six years of work on behalf of the denomination. Dykstra resigned on April 5.

Synod 2011 acknowledged that handling of personnel issues "at times fell short of good order and grace."

Synod also offered a public prayer of lament for the pain caused to Dykstra, denominational Board of Trustees (BOT) members, and others, followed by a prayer of thanksgiving for the work of the same people.

Synod heard that Dykstra's resignation was requested by the BOT following a "thorough and independent performance review." The ensuing public communication—that Dykstra resigned for "personal and family reasons"—was agreed upon

between Dykstra and the denomination's Board of Trustees, synod was told.

As delegates took up the matter, Synod 2011 president Rev. James Dekker explained that the synod officers had decided the proceedings were best handled in a public, transparent manner, rather than in closed session.

Rev. Mark Vermaire, president of the BOT, said the executive director's performance is reviewed by an independent evaluator every three years.

This year's review included a thorough investigation of organizational structure and culture "because of important issues the Board was dealing with," Vermaire said.

Some delegates were not happy with the amount of information given. Rev. Tim Kuperus, Classis Grandville, said, "I am not

comfortable with the work that we have in its totality."

Synod delegates had the opportunity to honor and thank Dykstra for his contribution to the denomination later in the week.

Rev. Brian Bosscher, Classis Georgetown, said, "You helped the church focus on the health of the local congregation. In the years that you served our denomination as an executive director, you worked tirelessly to help the church grow."

Delegates responded with a standing ovation.

—Ryan Struyk and Roxanne Van Farowe

Vice president Rev. George Vink: "Speakers still have the privilege of speaking, though it may be at this time like swimming up Niagara Falls."

Synod Hears Report from Trustees

Synod 2011 heard a formal report from the denomination's Board of Trustees about its work.

It was the first such address, following Synod 2010's decision to set aside time at each synod to hear a report from the board.

Rev. Mark Vermaire, who completes his six-year term on June 30, reported on what has been "a challenging, weighty year in the work of the board."

Like synod, he said, the board has work that is important though routine.

Like synod, much of the work of the board is uplifting, even renewing, Vermaire said. He noted the excitement and hope experienced by the board in such things

as ratifying the appointment of Rev. Moses Chung as director of Christian Reformed Home Missions, and endorsing the proposal for a Young Adult Summit.

"To participate in discussions and decisions like these are a part of the joy of the work, much like you have and will experience in the days ahead," Vermaire said.

But he acknowledged the work and the past year also had difficult challenges. "We have wrestled with the challenges of our structure and culture, just as synod has and will."

Vermaire noted several resignations that took place during the past year: Beth Swagman, director of Safe Church Ministry; Rev. Jerry Dykstra, executive director of the

CRC; and Sandy Johnson, director of denominational ministries.

"These resignations brought pain and sadness to our work as a board," Vermaire said. "We welcome and appreciate the oversight and responsibility of synod to attend to this matter."

Vermaire reported the board's gratitude that Rev. Joel Boot rose quickly to the top of the list of those gifted and able to serve the church as interim executive director for the next two years. "Joel did not seek the job, but out of his attention to the voice of God and his love for the church, he accepted this appointment, which we present to synod for ratification."

—Gayla R. Postma



KAREN HUTTENG

Rev. Mark Vermaire: "We welcome and appreciate the oversight and responsibility of synod."

Synod Appoints Task Force to Review Church Structure

Synod 2011 mandated a one-year task force to review the administrative structure of the Christian Reformed Church—its organization, culture, and leadership.

Synod adopted a statement that noted, "The abrupt and painful resignations of key leaders in our denomination demonstrate the need for the task force."

Other reasons given for the task force were that "conflicting governance and administrative structures need resolution" and "the current organizational culture is unhealthy."

The new task force will comprise the interim executive director, two Board of Trustees members, two denominational staff, three CRC members at large, a Synod 2011 delegate from the advisory committee that handled the matter, and an expert in organizational development. The task force will report to Synod 2012.

"We need to grow in our denominational culture. . . . We want to see growth in the way we relate to one another," said Rev. Mark Vermaire, outgoing president of the CRC's Board of Trustees.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



KAREN HUTTENG

Elder Rick Plantinga drummed law and order into Synod 2011 delegates.

Former Police Officer Polices Synod

Chosen for his experience as a police officer, the sergeant-at-arms at this year's synod was elder Rick Plantinga, Classis B.C. South-East.

The sergeant-at-arms is responsible for prodding delegates away from their coffee breaks and back onto the floor of synod. Since he wasn't provided a shepherd's crook (as was used at past synods), Plantinga used a drum to catch delegates' attention.

Keeping people in check comes naturally to Plantinga, who served as a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer for 35 years in British Columbia.

But nowadays, Plantinga spends more time watching over bees than people: he raises bees for orchard pollination.

"Bees are easier to get along with and they are a good example of how we should be. They all know their job and don't have to be told what to do. They even sacrifice themselves for the good of the colony."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Meets Interim Safe Church Director

Bonnie Nicholas, interim director of Safe Church Ministry, was introduced to Synod 2011.

"Every person is created in the image of God. I'm really proud to be a part of a church that affirms this," she said.

Nicholas was appointed to her office in April of this year. "A lot of people think that Safe Church is for other churches—it's not. We



KAREN HUTTENGA

Bonnie Nicholas

all wish we didn't have the problem [of abuse], but in fact it is there, and it affects a lot of people in our churches," she explained.

"Safe Church Ministry is here to provide a safe place for ministry, for growth. That can only happen when every single person feels safe."

—Ryan Struyk

Rev. Moses Chung Introduced



KAREN HUTTENGA

Rev. Moses Chung:
"If we don't pray, we die."

Delegates prayed for Chung by laying hands on him and speaking individual prayers all at once, which is common in the Korean Christian tradition.

"As a former member of a church where Moses Chung was a minister, I would like to heartily endorse him," said elder Thomas Byrna, Classis Greater Los Angeles.

Chung focused on prayer as a key part of his life and ministry. "Prayer is as vital as the air we breathe. If we don't pray, we die—spiritually, that is," he said.

"The most important thing that I want to say today, I thank you, and thank you, God," said Chung.

—Ryan Struyk

Synod 2011 welcomed Rev. Moses Chung, newly appointed as director of Christian Reformed Home Missions. Delegates went on to surround Chung in a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving.

"I'm truly humbled and honored but also very thrilled and grateful to stand before you today—truly humbled because I still can't figure out why God would call a sinner like me and give me a job like this," said Chung.

Synod 2011 Honors Seminary President



KAREN HUTTENGA

Rev. Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

Synod 2011 paid tribute to Rev. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. for his service as president of Calvin Theological Seminary for 10 years.

"He has left his mark on the institution. He's left his mark on the denomination," said Rev. Rita Klein-Geltink, Classis Huron. "Even more importantly, he's left his mark on many men and women, myself included."

Klein-Geltink praised Plantinga for his personal interest in students. "It really was a privilege to

be a student at [the seminary] during the years when Dr. Plantinga served as president," she said.

"During the time each student was at seminary, he would invite them into his home for a dinner party. I remember the evening well," Klein-Geltink recalled.

Klein-Geltink said she heard from a friend of Plantinga that, "Neal has unswerving integrity, humility, graciousness, and a sense of appreciation. He does not speak ill of others; he has a deep sense of fairness."

The Board of Trustees of the seminary granted him the title of president emeritus.

"Neal, we thank God for you," said Klein-Geltink. "You've blessed us and may God bless you . . . as you move on from here."

Synod honored Plantinga with a standing ovation for his years of service and leadership.

—Ryan Struyk

Synod Ratifies Appointment of Rev. Joel Boot

Synod 2011 ratified the Board of Trustees' appointment of Rev. Joel Boot as the Christian Reformed Church's interim executive director for the next two years.

Elder Evan Cuperus, Classis Georgetown, shared with delegates that Boot was his pastor at Ridgewood CRC in Jenison, Mich., since 1992—a pastor and friend who was there for weddings, baptisms, professions of faith, and also untimely deaths in Cuperus's family.

"Joel Boot is God's choice," said Cuperus. "Something we've known at Ridgewood CRC for 19 years is now being shared with the CRC."

—Roxanne Van Farowe



KAREN HUTTENGA

Elder Evan Cuperus seconds the motion to ratify Rev. Joel Boot's appointment.

Ben Vandezande



KAREN HUTTENG

Home Missions Interim Director Thanked

Synod honored Ben Vandezande, retiring interim director of Christian Reformed Home Missions, for his service over the past two and a half years.

Rev. Moses Chung, incoming director, said, "He has been God's gift to me, to Home Missions, and to the church. I have been so impressed by him and have learned so much from him. I appreciate his deep love and dedication for God's mission."

Synod 2011 president Rev. James Dekker thanked Vandezande for his work, adding, "Ben Vandezande has been a friend and mentor to me for at least the last seven or eight years."

Chung and Vandezande embraced as Vandezande came to the podium. "It's a joy to be before you today not because my work is done but because of what we are doing," Vandezande said.

—Ryan Struyk



Synod 2011 welcomed 42 candidates for ministry.

Synod Approves Candidates for Ministry

Synod 2011 welcomed 42 candidates into ministry with a standing ovation—thanking God, the candidates, and their families for their commitment.

"I am thrilled, privileged, and honored to welcome you to the steps that you have already begun and now will continue," said synod president Rev. James Dekker.

—Ryan Struyk

Synod Thanks Seminary Vice President

Synod 2011 thanked Rev. Duane K. Kelderman for his 10 years of service at Calvin Theological Seminary as its vice president of administration and associate professor of preaching.

Kelderman also served in various other places in the denomination, including several congregations, on the Candidacy Committee, Board of Trustees, and at several synods as a delegate and faculty advisor.

Rev. Duane Kelderman

"I learned to appreciate very much the work that he and others in the seminary did for us," said Rev. Daniel Zylstra, Classis Quinte. "A large part of why that program is good is due to the work of people such as Duane."

"Through the continuing education program of Calvin Seminary, Duane has played a significant role in encouraging pastors and congregations in our denomination and beyond. We are thankful for the work that you've been able to do among us," added Zylstra.

—Ryan Struyk



Synod 2011 Goes Almost Paperless

Synod 2011 goes down in history as the first "paperless" synod.

It wasn't entirely paperless. The *Agenda* was still printed as a book. And at one point, synod had to use paper ballots when the system failed during a vote.

But the reams of paper usually produced at synod are no more.

A new business system meant voting forms, advisory committee reports, and all other documents were on a website, and synod delegates were issued laptops to access all items.

The Information Technology department of the CRC had plenty of help on hand for anyone needing assistance.

One of those IT members, Jim Boldenow, said the wireless network served 250 people and was very solid, and the way documents were handled went well. "There is room for improvement but for a first year it was great. Even delegates with little computer experience were comfortable with it at the end," he said.



LEN VANDER ZEE



Delegates poured over computer screens instead of paper this year.

He said that the "yes-no" voting function (primarily used for voting on recommendations) needs improvement. "There was one complete failure and some slowness on the rest," Boldenow said. The vote that failed was probably caused by a file becoming corrupt due to delegate manipulation, he said.

At one point, when the voting system experienced that complete failure, synod had to resort to paper ballots, something that had not been done in 15 years.

The new business system was produced over the past year and a half in cooperation with the Reformed Church in America. That denomination's synod convened right after the CRC's synod and used the same system.

—Gayla R. Postma

(L-r): Rev. Bert Slofstra, Dee Recker, and Rev. George Vink count paper ballots when the electronic voting system failed.



KAREN HUTTENG

Greetings from Reformed Church in America

Rev. Tom De Vries, nominated to be the next general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, brought greetings from his church to Synod 2011.

De Vries mentioned some of the RCA-CRC partnerships that happen on a local level, and concluded: "We recognize that these partnerships can be multiplied....We pray that we can come together in many more ways in the future."

The purpose of the unity we seek between the two denominations is love, he said. "Our prayer is that we can give each other a little love."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Greetings from Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken

Rev. Peter Sinia brought greetings to Synod 2011 from the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK). "We thank our God every time we remember you," he said.

The small Dutch denomination gets a lot of guidance from Christian Reformed scholarship and worship practices, according to Sinia. "Your knowledge and creativity may help us to end our worship wars and enrich our worship," he said.

The denomination began ordaining women in 2007 and recently created a study committee on the issue of homosexuality, Sinia told delegates.

He called the Netherlands a country of contrasts, a country with many material blessings, "yet less and less people thank God for all these blessings," he said. "Only 19 percent of Dutch people visit church at least once a month."

The NGK experienced 1 percent growth last year—something so rare for a Dutch church that it was reported in national newspapers, Sinia said.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



KAREN HUTTENG

Rev. Peter Sinia, Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken

Greetings from Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria

Rev. Risae Yakubu Shamiki brought greetings to Synod 2011 from the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria.

Reporting on his church, he said the denomination has grown to 78 churches, ordained eight new pastors, and now includes over 100,000 members.

Shamiki thanked the CRC representatives for the denomination's support of the work in Nigeria, and for acting as a "parent" to the RCCN. "Thank you for being a formidable shade by God's grace for many around the world. The RCCN is proud to be associated with you," he said.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

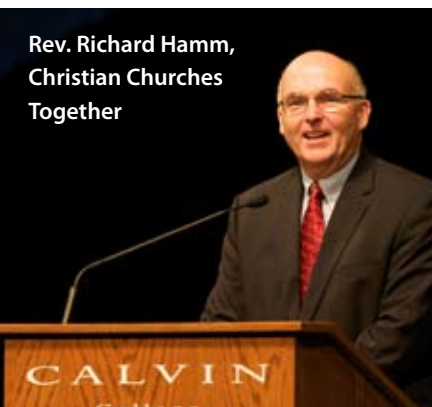
Greetings from Christian Churches Together

Rev. Richard Hamm visited Synod 2011 as a fraternal delegate from Christian Churches Together (CCT), a relatively new organization of 43 churches and organizations, including the CRC.

CCT focuses primarily on evangelism and fighting domestic poverty, according to Hamm. "I have been amazed at how much agreement we have around the issue of domestic poverty, especially at a time when so many families are suffering because of difficult economic times," he said.

Working together with other churches makes our witness more credible in an often anti-religious society, Hamm said. "Even as we honor our differences, we must continue to more deeply understand one another and look for ways to witness together."

—Roxanne Van Farowe



KAREN HUTTENG

Rev. Richard Hamm, Christian Churches Together

Greetings from World Communion of Reformed Churches

Rev. Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), visited Synod 2011 as a fraternal delegate.

"I pray that the season of Pentecost will be a time that this synod listens to the direction of the Holy Spirit," Nyomi said. "I am especially appreciative of the CRC for the participation and leadership that you continue to provide."

Rev. William Koopmans, a CRC pastor, and Rev. Peter Borgdorff, CRC executive director emeritus, serve on the WCRC executive committee.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches includes 80 million Reformed Christians in 108 countries around the world, representing 230 denominations.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



KAREN HUTTENG

Rev. Setri Nyomi, World Communion of Reformed Churches

Agreement on Common Baptism with Roman Catholic Church Approved

The Christian Reformed Church has never required new members from the Roman Catholic Church to be rebaptized, but Synod 2011 made that position official, though not all delegates agreed with the decision.

Roman Catholic churches will also recognize Christian Reformed Church baptisms, thanks to a common Certificate of Baptism that synod also adopted for use in the CRC.

Synod approved a "Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism," a document shared by the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, as well as the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S.

"This agreement says nothing about the Roman Catholic Church, just that this baptism is valid," said Rev. Ron Feenstra, a member of the



Rev. Harold Caicedo (right) with translation help from Rev. Felix Fernandez: "I cannot agree with accepting Roman Catholic baptisms."

CRC's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, which worked out the agreement during seven years of ecumenical dialogue.

Rev. Harold Caicedo, Classis California South, said he could not

agree with accepting Roman Catholic baptisms. Every person in his congregation was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, he said, and 23 people have asked to be re-baptized by him.

"If I, as the pastor, tell all these people who desire to be baptized that it's not necessary to be baptized because we accept the baptism of the Roman Catholic Church, the

following days would have none of these people in my church," said Caicedo, speaking through an interpreter. "I invite the CRC to investigate further our condition in relation to the Roman Catholic Church for the Latino community."

"People who have a spiritual awakening in their lives sometimes want to affirm that by being re-baptized," said Rev. Henry Gunnink, Classis Lake Superior. "It seems to me that the CRC should make some sort of exception for people like that who have serious professional conviction about the tradition from which they came."

The agreement affirms that baptism is a sacramental gateway into the Christian life and should be conferred only once, using water and the "scriptural Trinitarian formula: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

CRC Establishes Ties with Churches in Myanmar, Haiti

Synod 2011 voted to be in formal relationships with Christian Reformed churches in Myanmar and in Haiti.

Delegates approved entering into full ecclesiastical fellowship with the Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar. Churches in ecclesiastical fellowship are those Reformed churches with whom the denomination is most closely connected. These churches often exchange fraternal delegates with the CRC, and their pastors may preach from CRC pulpits (and vice versa).

The Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar includes about 6,000 believers.

Synod also voted to enter into dialogue with the Christian Reformed Church of Haiti. To be in dialogue means the CRC is exploring the possibility of moving toward ecclesiastical fellowship with that church.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

CRC Honors Retiring RCA Director

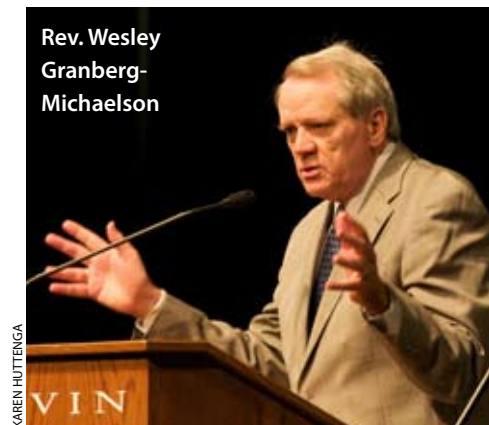
Synod 2011 honored Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, retiring general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, with a "resolution of appreciation."

Granberg-Michaelson has served in the position since 1994.

The resolution called Granberg-Michaelson "a visionary leader of Christ's church and a champion of the ecumenical movement," who "encouraged the glorious cause of Christian unity."

He was also, the resolution said, "a special friend and encourager of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, fostering a warm relationship between our denominations and bringing us to new levels of collaboration and affection."

Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson



"I'm very moved and give my heartfelt thanks to this synod," said Granberg-Michaelson. "When I think back, I am so grateful for my relationship with the CRC and how we are growing closer together."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

No Ministry Share Increase, Ad Campaign Launched to Boost Giving

Synod 2011 approved a budget that included no increase in ministry shares for 2011-2012. Delegates also heard about an ad campaign that will help promote the ministry share system.

Ministry share is the dollar amount the Christian Reformed Church asks its churches

to contribute per adult member to advance the denomination's shared ministry efforts.

The \$316.76 requested per member remains at the 2010-2011 level. However, the allocation of ministry share revenue within the CRC's overall 2011-2012 budget of \$209

million has been adjusted.

Christian Reformed Home Missions and the CRC's Specialized Ministries will each receive a 6 percent increase. General administration of the denomination's business, which includes expenses of synod and the Board of Trustees, will receive 18 percent less this year.

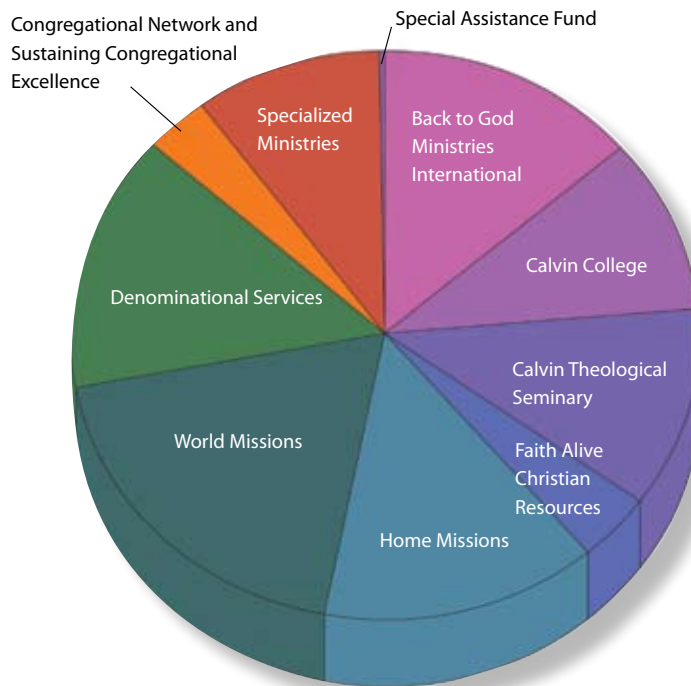
The biggest boost in revenue is for The Network, Sustaining Congregational Excellence, and Volunteer Services, which together get a 32 percent bump in funding.

Synod also heard about a major promotional effort undertaken by the denomination to promote engagement in and understanding of ministry shares.

Peter Harkema, director of denominational advancement, told Synod 2011 delegates, "This remains a very good way to fund ministry."

The CRC has launched an advertising campaign for ministry shares, based on the tagline "You add. God multiplies."

—Dan Postma



Ministry Share Breakdown for Fiscal 2012¹

Back to God Ministries International	\$43.97
Calvin College	\$31.60
Calvin Theological Seminary	\$35.91
Faith Alive Christian Resources	\$12.49
Home Missions	\$46.88
World Missions	\$60.56
Synodical Administrative Services ²	\$38.19
Congregational Network, Sustaining Congregational Excellence, Volunteer Services	\$13.94
Specialized Ministries ³	\$32.86
Special Assistance Fund ⁴	\$0.36

Total Per-Member Assessment

\$316.76 (unchanged from 2010)

¹ These amounts represent allocation for the \$316.76 ministry share for the 2012 fiscal year budget (July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012). Allocation of ministry share for fiscal 2013 will be determined as the budgets for that year are developed this fall.

² Synod Assembly, Board of Trustees, and General Administration.

³ Chaplaincy Ministries, Disability Concerns, ministries in Canada (Aboriginal Ministries, Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue), Pastor-Church Relations, Race Relations, Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action, Restorative Justice, and Safe Church Ministry.

⁴ A fund that provides assistance to cover the cost of a pastor's final move at retirement, as well as special needs of retired pastors or their surviving spouses.

Synod Approves Pension Plan Changes

Facing limited options, Synod 2011 approved increasing the normal retirement age for Christian Reformed pastors from 65 to 66, decreasing benefits available for early retirement, changing the cost of spousal benefits, and increasing the contributions churches must make to the Ministers' Pension Fund.

The changes come as pension trustees grapple with Canadian regulatory changes. In addition, significant losses from the 2008-2009 market crash, coupled with decisions of earlier synods that increased retirement benefits, together pose more problems for trustees.

Changes in regulatory oversight in Canada forced the most dramatic changes to the pension plans. Rather than allowing underfunded liabilities of the plan to be met over a 15-year horizon, regulators now demand that the plan be fully funded within five years. Delegates heard that a viable strategy was required by July 1, 2011, or the plan would be dissolved by Canadian regulators.

The funded status of the plans was impacted in large part by the market downturn of 2008-2009, as well as the significant benefit improvements granted by synods in 1999 and 2001. Those synods significantly increased total payment levels and early retirement benefits, and made the increases retroactive to 1985. These were, as synod heard today from the CRC's director of finance, "huge benefit improvements done in those two years."

In addition to the benefit adjustments, churches across the denomination must now add 15



John Bolt, the CRC's director of finance and administration, explains pension plan changes.

percent to their pension contributions. Short-term borrowing will cover the rest of the shortfall.

It is anticipated that the plan will be deemed solvent in 2015, at which time the pension trustees and synod will review the situation. None of this synod's changes affect current pension recipients, only those who retire after June 30, 2011.

One elder delegate, Walter Neutel from Eastern Canada, proposed a fundraising campaign for the Ministers' Pension Fund. "To put all the burden on ministers and their spouses is not entirely fair. I hope we look at these as interim measures," he said.

—Dan Postma

Fraternal delegate Rev. Dr. Richard Hamm: "Like laws and sausages, church decisions are best if not seen while being made."

Rev. Jack Van de Hoef: "When I was young, I was taught to fold my hands during prayer. Nowadays, it's not just folding our hands but folding our laptops."

Rules Tightened for Exchange of Pastors with RCA

Synod 2011 tightened rules for exchanging ministers with the Reformed Church in America.

Under the amended rules, graduates of an RCA seminary must either serve in an RCA congregation before taking a call in the CRC or follow the rules of the CRC's candidacy process to enter ministry in the CRC.

Previously, those newly ordained by the RCA could go directly to a Christian Reformed church position, but those who qualified for candidacy in the CRC without first serving a church in that denomination could not serve in the RCA, explained Rev. David Koll, denominational director of candidacy.

"We think it will strengthen both denominations if pastors have had rootedness in their own tradition," said Koll.

Some delegates expressed concern that the rules would limit opportunities for candidates of the two denominations.

"My experience in seeking a call was a long and difficult one," said Rev. Elizabeth Vander Haagen, Classis Grand Rapids East. "I pursued many different ones, including within the RCA, so I have concern for closing that door."

Koll responded that the candidacy process is "smoother than it has ever been before."

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Elder Alan Bliek with his 1937 Chevy

Going to Synod in Classic Style

Elder Alan Bliek, Classis Wisconsin, trekked the 437 miles (approximately 700 kilometers) to Synod 2011 in his classic two-door 1937 Chevrolet.

"As long as I've got to come to synod, it is a lot more fun to drive that car," Bliek said.

—Ryan Struyk



PHOTOS BY KAREN HUTTENGA

Blest Be the Tie That Doesn't Bind

Rev. James Dekker, president of Synod 2011, hadn't expected to be elected, so he didn't pack any ties.

A synod staffer provided him with a selection of ties, but delegates voted that Dekker did not need to wear a tie, though the first clerk suggested that perhaps they should sing "Blest Be the Tie that Binds."

The ties spent the day draped over the podium instead of around Dekker's neck.

—Gayla R. Postma



Elder James Roskam, Classis Grandville, found time for a nap.



Revs. Jonathan Kim (left) and Taek Yang take a coffee break.



Synod Assists Injured Delegate

Elder William Karshima, Classis Southeast U.S., tore his Achilles' tendon while playing soccer with other delegates. Since he is not insured, Synod 2011 delegates took up a collection to help pay his medical bills, which included surgery. Delegates raised a total of \$2,300.

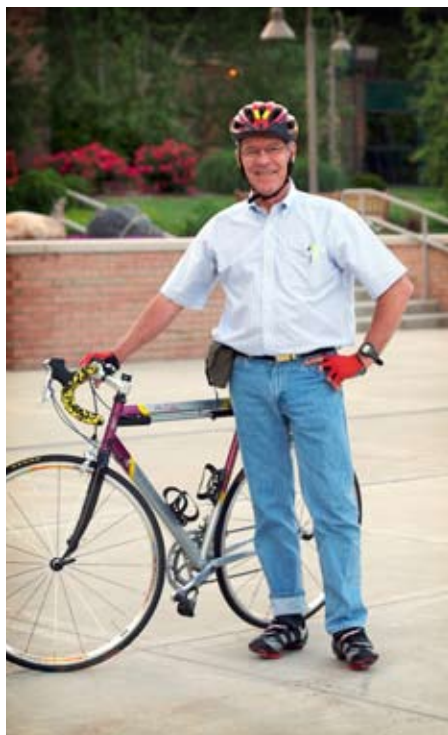
"Thank you so much for your love, prayers, and support," Karshima said to delegates Thursday morning. "I plan to be more careful at next synod," he added.

—Ryan Struyk

Elder William Karshima



Elder Byron Bulthuis, Classis Heartland, helped pass the time by crocheting.



Synod president Rev. James Dekker biked to synod most days.



Rev. Randy Rowland (left) and Rev. Robert Heerspink

Twins?

They may look like twins, but Rev. Robert Heerspink (right) and Rev. Randy Rowland are just good friends.

Heerspink is director of Back to God Ministries International, and Rev. Randy Rowland was a delegate to Synod 2011 from Classis Pacific Northwest.

—Ryan Struyk



A student from Potter's House school provided liturgical dance at one of the morning devotions.

Father and Son Attend Synod 2011

Rev. Bruce Adema, the Christian Reformed Church's director of Canadian Ministries, attended Synod 2011 with his son Seth this year.

Seth, 22, served as a youth representative. He is a doctoral student at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.

Five years ago, Bruce attended synod with his own father, who was a delegate.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Rev. Bruce Adema (left) and Seth Adema



Lots of art was provided in the synod prayer room.



IT staff Lee Scheibel (left) and Jim Boldenow take a break.

Vice president Rev. George Vink: "Synod is like a cruise ship. You get all the food you want to eat, and it takes you a week to figure out where you're going."



Tell Me a Story

by Sandy Swartzentruber

The Promised Land is so close that the Israelites can almost taste it. They can smell it in the air. After being enslaved for 430 years in Egypt and wandering in the desert for 40 more, the big moment has arrived.

They're standing on the edge of the flooded Jordan River, one of the boundaries of "the land of milk and honey." The priests carrying the ark of the covenant step into the river—and a miracle happens, just like God said it would.

Instead of flowing downstream, as water is supposed to do, the water "piled

up in a heap" so the priests and all the 12 tribes of Israel could cross the riverbed on dry ground.

But God doesn't let them step one toe farther into Canaan until they do something of utmost importance.

God tells the Israelites to take 12 stones from the middle of the Jordan and pile them up in their camp. Why? So that when coming generations of children see the stone monument, they'll ask for the story behind it.

Human beings love stories—that's part of how God made us. Our need to hear and tell stories shows at our family gath-

erings, in the movies we watch, in our Facebook posts, in sermons, and in bedtime books. Every culture has its own stories and storytellers who remind people of where they've been and help guide them into their future.

So it's no wonder that when God's Word came to us, God's Word came in the form of a true story—an unfolding drama in which we all have a part. God knows that nothing captures humans' imaginations like a compelling story told well.

That's why the importance of story is the driving force behind two major new curricula just released by Faith Alive: DWELL, a Sunday school curriculum for grades K-8; and WE, a series of whole-church events designed to build faith intergenerationally.

“God knows that nothing captures humans' imaginations like a compelling story told well.”



To see how DWELL can help God's big story come alive for the kids in your church, call Faith Alive at 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.DwellCurriculum.org for more information including online samples, scope and sequence, and a video tour. DWELL is also a great fit for churches that have used Faith Alive's LiFE curriculum, which will be discontinued this summer.

DWELL: Giving Kids Space to Hear God

Today's kids (and parents) are busy. Even when they're playing, the pace is fast—images zip around a computer screen, soccer balls fly everywhere, thumbs text away like mad.

But God knows that we need to rest from all our busyness in order to hear his voice: "Be still and know that I am God."

DWELL makes space for kids in grades K-8 to pause—to imagine, wonder, and marvel at God's big story of redemption and renewal—and to find their place in that story.

Karen DeBoer, one of DWELL's editors, says, "DWELL encourages kids to

step into God's story by imagining and interacting—to better understand this epic of God's love, renewal, and redemption. As they do, their eyes are opened to the fact that God is still at work in the world—and in their lives—and that they have the opportunity to be a part of God's ongoing story."

How does DWELL do this? Step by step. Each DWELL lesson has four parts:

Step 1: Gathering—This step uses various activities to help kids make connections between their everyday lives and God's story.

Step 2: Entering the Story—Kids hear part of God's story or read it together. Then they wonder together about the people in the story and how God cared for them. This helps them put themselves into the story and discover what it means to them. "Story symbols" also create a visual timeline of God's story.

Step 3: Living into the Story—Kids and their leader retell the story together. Brain research emphasizes the importance of repetition for learning, and this step helps the story "stick."

Step 4: Living out of the Story—Kids respond to the story and join God's mission in a range of ways: song, craft, service project, prayer time.

Each step of a DWELL lesson brings that day's story alive for kids. But the way the whole curriculum is structured helps them see the entire sweep of God's big story.

The "scope and sequence" of DWELL is meticulously crafted to help kids see the Bible as one unfolding epic of which they're a part, rather than as just a string of stories about people who lived long ago.

DeBoer says, "Kids who experience DWELL from kindergarten through grade 5 will go through the narrative of Scripture—God's stories of creation, fall, and redemption—twice. Then, at the middle school level, young teens dive into God's story at various points to discover how the doctrine of the church—summarized in Q&A's from the Reformed tradition—is grounded in the story of God's love and faithfulness found in Scripture."



We are story-formed people. Our lives are first shaped by narrative, not by information. We don't learn how to live the Christian life by memorizing facts, rules, precepts, morals. . . . Instead, from our earliest moments we experience the stories of those who have gone before us; stories from the Old and New Testaments; stories from the history of the Church throughout the centuries; stories of our own families and local congregations; stories that are enacted each week in the drama we call worship and in the everyday conversations and practices of the home.

—Sarah Arthur in *Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults* (Faith Alive, pp. 38-39)

WE: All Ages Living God's Story Together

Picture these people from your church: a 6-year-old child, a young teen, a college student, a middle-aged dad, a refugee, and an 80-year-old grandmother. Now picture them sitting around a table together after sharing some good food. They watch as other members of your church present a drama about how God called Abraham to be a blessing to the nations.

WE works with any other curriculum or education program, it's easy to use, and with materials priced at under \$20 per event, it's budget-friendly. For more information about WE, including downloadable samples, visit www.WEcurriculum.org or call Faith Alive at 1-800-333-8300.

Connect with Faith Alive

Faith Alive, formerly CRC Publications, is the publishing ministry of the Christian Reformed Church. We produce Sunday school curricula, Bible studies, books, worship resources, and more to help kids, teens, and adults grow in their faith at church and at home.

Visit our websites:

www.FaithAliveResources.org (for more information and to order products)

www.TheBanner.org (for more content than just the print magazine!)

www.ReformedWorship.org (25 years of worship resources at your fingertips)

www.nurturekidsfaith.org (a blog that helps families grow in faith together)

www.LibrosDesafio.org (for resources in Spanish)

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

You can also walk in to our bookstores in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Burlington, Ontario. We'd love to meet you in person!



How might their insights into the story of Abraham differ? What could they teach each other?

Now picture them rolling clay into long ropes to make a "blessing bowl," filling the bowl with blessings they write together as they talk about what it means to be blessed and to be a blessing.

Intergenerational learning like this is the foundation of a new curriculum from Faith Alive called WE—an innovative program unlike anything churches have used before.

WE is a series of two-hour intergenerational events in which the whole congregation gathers for a meal and to hear God's story together.

Each WE event covers a major segment of the biblical narrative (such as the story of Abraham or David), taking participants through the whole sweep of Scripture in a year.

WE can be used in addition to the DWELL curriculum or any other curriculum. Like DWELL, WE includes several steps:

Step 1: Gathering—Participants sit around tables to share a meal in intergenerational groups of six to eight. Informal conversation starters help them get comfortable with each other.

Step 2: Participants enter God's story as it's told through drama, readers' theater, audience participation, or other

means. Then they **live into God's story** together by doing a simple but meaningful activity with the people at their table. It might be an art project, an experience like a simplified version of the Stations of the Cross, or a service project.

Step 3: Reflect and Praise: The whole group reflects on what they learned together and praises God with songs, a litany, or other activity. Take-home devotionals appropriate for kids and adults invite participants to continue their reflection at home. "Take It Further" cards suggest practical ways to incorporate the learning into everyday life.

Ruth Vander Hart, Faith Alive's senior curriculum editor, says the development of WE was inspired in part by the work of John Roberto, an expert in intergenerational learning.

"Roberto's excitement is contagious," she said. "He told us that, over and over again, he has seen the Spirit work through intergenerational programs to transform congregations into strong communities who grow in faith together. WE events can spark that same kind of transformation and closer community in our churches."



Sandy Swartzentruber works for Faith Alive and is a member of Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

God Has a Plan for Us

It was the first day in my new office—and there it was. Left anonymously by a friend. A plaque with the words of Jeremiah 29:11 engraved on it: “I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

That plaque was not just standing on my desk but speaking from my desk, with the Voice that brings peace. With less than absolute confidence, I whispered back, “I hope so, Lord.”

Well, the past two weeks have reinforced the message. Countless offers of help. Innumerable promises of prayer. Constant words of encouragement. All repeating the promise of the Lord, speaking undeniably to my heart and now unmistakably from my desk: “I know the plans I have for you . . . to give you hope and a future.”

The words of poet Sietze Buning’s mother, from *Purpaleanie and Other Permutations*, have hung over my desk for years:

Amen, Father, on your planning.
Amen, for you’ll see us through.
Amen, when the cross lies heavy,
Amen everything you do.

“Amen,” I whispered quietly.

Between then and now, I attended Synod 2011. The 188 delegates and dedicated staff in nine advisory committees made their way through the 695-page *Agenda for Synod* and brought it back in segments as a love-gift to God.

We noted the retirements of 47 ministers of the Word, acknowledged receiving 16 pastors from other denominations, endorsed the ordinations of at least 37 candidates from 2010, approved 28 ministry associate positions, and met and received this year’s Calvin Theological Seminary graduates.

Delegates remarked to one another about how exciting it was to hear from all our shared ministries. God is at work,

fulfilling his plans. Even using us! We had more hope; we opened ourselves more boldly to the future.

A small group of us met with the fraternal delegates to our synod, representing “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). It was a glimpse of God’s plan unfolding.



I sat beside the incoming general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, Rev. Tom De Vries. A brother in Christ from Nigeria, seated across the room, said the sight of the two of us together was “the heartbeat of God.” He asked if he could take a picture to bring back to his people to show them that we can be one. I heard the heartbeat too, and I saw the plan a bit better.

The conclusion of our meetings repeated God’s promise more clearly still. Nearly 200 of us met with the more than 200 delegates to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to celebrate. We rejoiced over belonging to the Planner, being part of God’s plan, engaging in joint translation and publishing ventures, but most of all over the privilege of demonstrating some of the oneness for which our Lord prayed.

We celebrated what may prove to be the beginning of a family reunion. Then we walked in procession from the Covenant Fine Arts Center auditorium to the Calvin College chapel and worshiped together. We stepped up to the table, set with symbols of both the cost and certainty of eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

That is when I heard it most clearly: “I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

And I remembered that the plaque on my new desk had spoken even more clearly through its form than its words: in the shape of a cross—the sign of God’s promise kept.

I hear it much better now. I see it more clearly. I believe it more surely. The plan is good. Tomorrow is bright with hope. I look forward to the future. And I say this not with a whisper, but a shout! ■

“God is at work . . .
even using us!”



Rev. Joel Boot is interim executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

CHURCHATWORK

Words of Hope for Japan

When the March 11 earthquake and tsunami hit Japan, Mr. Minoru Y. witnessed the destruction of everything in his coastal city of Kamaishi in northern Japan. He spent two days at an evacuee shelter and was unable to contact his parents and other relatives for a week.

Soon after the disaster, Rev. Masao Yamashita, Japanese leader for Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI), sent letters to all listeners on the ministry's mailing list, expressing concern for their losses, inquiring about their welfare, and assuring them of the prayers of God's people. Letters of response made it clear that listeners were trusting God to provide, even as they looked for more words of hope as they face long-term recovery.

"Thank you for your letter," Mr. Minoru Y. told Rev. Yamashita. "Now I know [my family] are all safe. I have never experienced such a big earthquake before. We are getting help, not just from



Japan but from all over the world. I am very grateful."

"The disaster area is vast," said Rev. Takashi Yoshida, moderator of the Reformed Church of Japan. He contacted Rev. Bob Heerspink, BTGMI director, encouraging BTGMI to expand communication with people in the disaster area. "Many people here cannot watch TV but still listen to the radio."

Rev. Larry Spalink, Japan team leader for Christian Reformed World Missions, affirmed this need: "Radio outreach has

Two lone figures walk amidst the devastation of the Japan earthquake.

new life in this heavily damaged region, as other lifelines are down."

At their April 28 meeting, the BTGMI board agreed to channel additional resources into broadcasting in northern Japan. BTGMI will also look for additional ministry partners in Japan to help fund increased broadcasting. ■

—Nancy Vander Meer, *Back to God Hour Ministries International*

Calvin Professors Land Fulbrights

Johnathan Bascom, a Calvin College geology, geography, and environmental studies professor, and Corwin Smidt, a Calvin political science professor, have landed prestigious 2011 Fulbright Awards.

Bascom will spend his Fulbright time partnering with Ethiopian geographers at Bahir Dar University on Lake Tana. He will teach, guest lecture for the masters and B.A. programs in geography, and facilitate authoring a new geography of Ethiopia. The text will serve as a basic reference for secondary school teachers throughout

the country, who teach the geography of Ethiopia to more than 500,000 students every year.

Smidt will be stationed at the Roosevelt Study Center in Middelburg, the Netherlands. He will be writing a book that traces changing political and theological perspectives of American clergy over the past 20 years. The work will draw on surveys he conducted in 1989, 2001, and 2009 with clergy from seven denominations: Assemblies of God, Southern Baptist, Christian Reformed Church, Reformed Church in America, Presbyte-



rian Church (USA), Disciples of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. ■

—Calvin College Communications

Johnathan Bascom, a geography professor at Calvin, and Corwin Smidt, a Calvin professor of political science, won Fulbright Awards.



A Window of Opportunity

Troy Bierma and Arbin Pokharel became good friends while they were at Kuyper College and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich. Arbin came from Kathmandu, Nepal's capital city; Troy, from the small town of Sioux Center, Iowa. Arbin had always planned on returning to Nepal, and as Troy learned more about Nepal, Troy began thinking about serving there too.

Troy and his wife, Faith, talked with Christian Reformed World Missions about overseas opportunities. An open position in Bangladesh that included connecting with partners in Nepal looked like a good fit. The Biermas accepted the

position and headed off to Bangladesh.

This spring, however, the Biermas' long-term ministry plans changed, bringing them to the place they had first hoped to be: Nepal.

Since continued political struggle has made it difficult for any ruling party to impose strict controls, people in Nepal are experiencing more religious freedom. Many Nepali people are looking and longing for a more prosperous life.

"There are two needs [in Nepal]," says Russ Palsrok, World Missions' EurAsia regional leader.

"First, to share the gospel with spiritually hungry people, [and second] to provide discipleship training for leaders and laity."

Troy Bierma (left) speaks accompanied by his Nepalese friend, Arbin Pokharel.

The Biermas' work in Nepal now builds on short visits they made earlier. Troy teaches at the Evangelical Presbyterian Theological Seminary, where Arbin is now the principal, and follows up with Timothy Leadership Training groups. "We have come to Nepal to teach and disciple [indigenous] Christians to be national Christian leaders," the Biermas say.

"There are more new believers than ever before and very few mature leaders to guide them." ■

—Sarah Van Stempvoort, *Christian Reformed World Missions*

CRC, RCA Join in Church-Planting Movement

Leaders from the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) are hoping a new church-planting initiative will create a "movement of Christ-followers" in communities across North America.

The two denominations are pooling resources in a collaborative church-planting movement that will spread the gospel by reaching out to people where they live. Seed funding for the project is being provided by the two denominations as well as by a significant grant from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation.

Denominational leaders say the strength of the joint approach will be its ability to develop visionary leaders and church planters who are theologically prepared and equipped to start and multiply churches that present the gospel in a way that is biblical, authentic, and contextual.

To launch the project, the churches have selected four test areas they're calling "Kingdom Enterprise Zones": Florida, Arizona, California, and West Michigan. The focus will be on evaluating emerging church planters, equipping and training church planters, empowering and coaching church planters, and expanding and parenting new churches. The specific regions were chosen because both denominations have significant potential in each area to grow new ministries, and each region also includes previously "hard to serve" contexts.

Collaborative RCA-CRC teams will provide vision, strategy, and relationship building. Denominational leaders, church planting staff and teams, church multiplication strategists, seminary presidents, and on-the-ground practitioners will all provide insight and input. ■

—Ben Van Houten, *Christian Reformed Home Missions*

Flying Kites Again

The wind was perfect, the sun was shining, and the people in West Sumatra, Indonesia, were eager to start their kite competition. This kite-flying event used to be held on an annual basis, sparking friendly competition between 11 villages in the township of Tandikat.

However, after the horrific tsunami in 2004 and then a deadly set of earthquakes two years ago, the event had been cancelled. Thanks to the efforts of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), the people once again had a reason to celebrate.



CRWRC responded to the 2004 tsunami under the program name "GenAssist." When a massive earthquake hit Sept. 30, 2009, followed by smaller earthquakes and a series of landslides, CRWRC was already there and quickly sent staff and volunteer International Relief Managers to assess the situation and begin

A young Indonesian boy shows off his kite.

a response. Eighteen months later, that \$2.2 million response was complete.

A weeklong celebration of the completion of CRWRC's earthquake response provided an opportunity for the community to finally come together to

reinstate their annual kite competition.

Community members flew more than 100 kites that day, most of which were artfully decorated with the names of GenAssist or CRWRC, along with words or phrases such as "Thank You" and "Memories." Each kite was made of paper stretched over a thin bamboo or wood frame. The kite that stayed up longest was declared the winner.

"They flew incredibly high!" said Wayne de Jong, director of International Disaster Relief for CRWRC. ■

—Kristen Vanderberg,
Christian Reformed World
Relief Committee

Celebrating the Future of Ministry

Candidates for the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church were presented to Synod 2011 delegates as well as to visitors and family members.

For the Calvin Theological Seminary students, the experience capped years of work and examinations.

Their last formal examination took place in late April at the CRC's Grand Rapids, Mich., office. That day panels of pastors interviewed 41 candidates. Other candidates were interviewed off site.

The veteran pastors were kind, yet demanding. Candidates emerged from the interview rooms knowing that they would be recommended to synod.

"The day is filled with inspiring stories from prospective candidates and with reflection focused on the church we all love," said Rev. David Koll, director of the CRC's Candidacy Committee.

The day also made seminarians consider their journeys.

"Eight years ago, the Lord dragged me—kicking and screaming—into following this crazy calling that he had given me to be a pastor," said seminarian Ken Kruithof.

"I look to the future and the great adventure that the Lord has planned for me; I am filled with great joy. My prayer at this point in my journey is that whatever God



Thyra Van Keeken (left) and Kyle Kloostra took part in the seminary's 2011 candidates' day.

has next for me, that I would embrace it with more joy and less kicking and screaming."

Late in the day, Thyra VanKeeken emerged from her interview with a big smile on her face. VanKeeken works as an intern for the CRC's Office of Social Justice and hopes to

serve a church, probably in Canada.

Asked how it went, the Canadian seminary student said exuberantly, "Great. It looks like I'll be a candidate." ■

—Chris Meehan, CRC
Communications

Advertising Information

Deadlines: August issue is 7/4/11; Sept. issue is 8/1/11. Visit www.thebanner.org for complete details.

Prices: Most ads are \$0.33^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.26^{US} per character applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements. Photos are \$22^{US} extra.

To Advertise: Place your classified ad online at www.TheBanner.org/classifieds. If you are unable to submit your ad online you may continue to email it to classifieds@TheBanner.org or fax it to 616-224-0834. If you have questions, call 616-224-0725.

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Denominational and Classical Announcements

Available for Call

AFTER AN AMICABLE SEPARATION through Article 17a, Blyth (ON) CRC heartily recommends its former pastor, Rev. John Kuperus, to the churches for call. He can be reached at pastorjohn@tcc.on.ca.

Eligible for Call

ELIGIBLE FOR CALL: Rehoboth CRC of Bowmanville, Ont is pleased to announce that Pastor Ron Smeding is now eligible for a call. He can be reached at rsmeding7@juno.com or 905-419-1377.

Financial Aid

CLASSIS NORTHERN ILLINOIS is now accepting student aid applications from students pursuing word-related ministries. Contact committee chair, Mark van Stee, 5130 Wolf Rd., Western Springs IL 60558 (email office@crcls.org). Application deadline July 31.

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS HOLLAND will meet in regular session September 15, 2011 at 3:00 PM at Holland Heights CRC, Holland, MI. Agenda items are due by August 4, 2011 and should be sent to: Rev. Tony Louwerse, Stated Clerk, email: louwerse@macatawa.org, Fax: 616-494-6054.

CLASSIS YELLOWSTONE will meet Thursday evening and all day Friday, Sept 15-16, 2011, in Green Meadow CRC, Helena, MT. Printed material for the Agenda & Budget requests should be received by Saturday, August 6. —Del VanDenBerg, Stated Clerk

Congregational Announcements

Church's 100th Anniversary

100TH ANNIVERSARY The Sanborn CRC of Sanborn, IA will celebrate its 100th anniversary on July 8, 9, and 10, 2011. Former members and friends are invited to attend. Information is available on the church website www.sanbornrcr.com or by contacting Jerry and Carol Buteyn by e-mail at jcbuteyn@mtcnet.net or (712-729-3262)

Church's 50th Anniversary

FAITH CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP of Walnut Creek, CA, is celebrating 50 years of God's grace and faithfulness on July 30-31, 2011. We invite friends and past members to attend. For more information, visit 50years.faithfellowship.com.

HOPE COMMUNITY CRC of Riverside, CA is celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness on October 8 – 9, 2011. We invite all friends and former members to join us. Please check our website for more information: www.hopcrcriverside.com.

HOPE CRC OF HULL, IA is celebrating "50 Years of Hope" on September 14-18, 2011. We invite all friends and former members to celebrate God's faithfulness with us. Visit www.hullhopeccr.org for more information.

Announcements

General

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION It is with celebration and thankfulness that the Council of Lombard CRC congratulates Pastor John Huizinga on the 25th anniversary of his ordination into the ministry. The Lord's blessings to him as he continues in service to our Lord.

Retirement

FIRST VISALIA Christian Reformed Church of Visalia, CA would like to announce that after 18 years of faithful service at First Church, and 36 years of service in the ministry, Pastor George Vink is retiring. We invite all friends and past members to attend the retirement party on August 21, 2011. For more information, please see the church website at www.visaliafirstcrc.org.

RETIREMENT: PASTOR HENRY JONKER The Council of Ladner Christian Reformed Church, Delta, BC, announces the retirement of our Pastor, Henry Jonker, effective June 30, 2011. Pastor Henry has faithfully served 4 Canadian Christian Reformed congregations over the span of some 37 years. He has also served in a variety of regional and denominational capacities. A special farewell worship service of thanksgiving will be held September 25, 2011 at 10:30 a.m. We invite friends and past members to join us in praise to God during this special service. For further information please call the church office at 604-946-7033 or contact us at ladnerccr@telus.net

Birthdays

100th Birthday



HENRY TAMELING 1020 S. Prospect, Elmhurst, IL 60126, celebrates his 100th birthday on July 7. His wife Marie (Essenburg), their children, Rog & Ticks Groenboom, Ben & Corrie, Rog & Leona Boerema, 9 grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren thank God for his continued blessing and faithfulness.

JOHN VANDERBILT 2064 S. San Antonio Ave., Ontario, CA 91762 will celebrate his 100th birthday on July 30. His wife, Effie, and family thank God for his faith and long life. "Great is Thy Faithfulness!"

90th Birthday

WILMA PAUL 1015 Heather Circle #4, Mt. Vernon, WA 98273 celebrates her 90th birthday on July 5. God bless you and we love you, Mom and Grandma!

CLARA STEPHENSON July 15, 280 W 40 St., Holland, MI 49423. Her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren wish her a joyful day and a deep sense of God's blessing.

80th Birthday

MARIAN J. WEIDENAAR, will celebrate her 80th birthday on July 6 at The Holland Home, 16300 Louis Ave. S. Holland, IL 60473, Room 410. Phone: 708-225-6410. Her family wishes her a happy day and God's blessings in the coming year.

Anniversaries

70th Anniversary

FEENSTRA, John and Joyce (Ykema) of 12461 68th Ave., Allendale, MI. 49401, celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on June 11, 2011. Congratulations and love from your children: Roger and Grace Feenstra, Herb and Janice Everman, Bernard and Cheryl Feenstra, Robert and Lorraine Feenstra, David and Margaret Feenstra, 18 grandchildren (1 deceased) and 19 great-grandchildren.

65th Anniversary

BLYSTRA Nick & Juliet, 95 Olde Mill #16 Holland MI 49423 will celebrate their 65th anniversary on July 23. Their children Judy, Louise, Myra (deceased), Harry, Gwen, & Bob and spouses; 11 grandchildren, 24 great-grandchildren give thanks to God for His faithfulness

BUSHOUSE, Edward and Phyllis (Balgooyen) 531 Oakes Ave, Grand Haven, MI, 49417 will celebrate their 65th anniversary on July 26. Children and grandchildren: Paul, Mary and Steven Porter (Christopher, Jeremy), Howard and Patricia (Matt & Erin, Elizabeth, Michelle). We praise God for His love and faithfulness!

KAMPSTRA Renny & Lucy (Fischer), 107 Canterbury Green Montgomery TX 77356. They were married on May 24 1946 in 1st Englewood CRC (Chicago). God gifted them with four children: Marjorie & Bob Smith, Jim & Sue Kampstra, George & Hilary Kampstra, Cindy & Casey Riney & 6 grandchildren. 65 years! What a blessing! PTL!

MEYER, Rich and Ann (Noordmans) 4737 Brentwood Ct, Holland, MI 49423 (formerly of New Jersey) will celebrate 65 years of marriage July 10, thanking God for His love and faithfulness! Congratulations from your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. We are so grateful for your Christian example, steadfastness, and servant hearts.

60th Anniversary

FISHER Charles and Ann (Vande Ree), P.O. Box 142, Wyckoff, NJ 07481, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on August 1. Children: John & Sheree, Jim, and Patti; grandchildren: Kristen & Chris Groen, Joel Fisher, Kara & Eric Van Marion; and great-grandchild, Carter, praise God for their love and faith.

HOOGSTRATEN Bastiaan (Bob) and Jennie (Munk), 8629 141st Way N. Seminole, FL 33776 will celebrate their 60th anniversary on July 22. Children: John & Susan (Caitlin), Anita & Ken Boonstra (Erin & Jesse), Nancy & Brian Nickel (Tim, Joel & Beth). Praise God for His faithfulness!

VEURINK Daniel & Mary (Dragt) of Cedar Lake, IN are celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary on June 29. Children: Wendy & Paul Williams, Mark & Amy, Lois & Rog Buikema, Cindi & Jerry Allen, Tim & Lori, Kris & Doug Bakker. 28 grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren.

WORKMAN - Alan and Margaret (Sturuss) 17720 Cobblefield Lane, Spring Lake, MI. 49456 Married June 20, 1951. Children: Linda Carver, Steven Workman, Lori and Ken Batts, Lisa and John Mulder. Son, Dean Workman, deceased in 2005. 22 grandchildren and 5 Great grandchildren. Poppy and Grandma, You Rock! Your love and faithfulness to God and to each other is a blessing to all of us. Congratulations and Love from your family.

50th Anniversary

DUIKER, Jerry & Susan (Andela) of RR#5 Stratford, Ontario will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on July 15, 2011. An Open House will be held in their honour on July 23, 2011 from 2-5pm at their home. Their 9 children, 19 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren praise God for their faith and love.

OTTE Hank and Mary (Bosch) of Dyer, IN celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 16, 2011. Children and grandchildren: Rodney & Jeana (Sarah, Laura, Steven & Emily) Kevin & Wendy (Kyle & Gabriel) Larry & Joanna (Jonathan & Joshua). We are thankful for God's blessings.

SCHPEL, Jerry & Ann (Grashuis) 6665 Leisure Way Dr SE, Caledonia, MI 49316 will celebrate their 50th anniversary on June 23, 2011 with their children Bob & Sue (Matt, Kyle, Brett) Bill, Betty & Rev. Phil Reinders (Owen, Lily) and Brian. God is good!

VAN ESSEN - Rev. Lester and Elaine (Last) will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Aug. 18, and Dad's 50th year in the ministry of the Word. Your children, 12 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild

praise God for His faithfulness to you and for your example of love and service. Celebrate with us at an open house in their honor on July 30th, from 2-4pm, at Trinity Christian Reformed Church, 539 East Pine St., Fremont, MI.

WESTENBROEK Rev. Robert and Jean (Witteveen), 18474 E. Columbia Circle, Aurora, CO 80013, will celebrate their 50th anniversary on July 25. We celebrate God's love and faithfulness to our parents - Doug & Lisa (Adam, Rachael, Chad), Rick and Nancy Fera (Janae, Mitchell, Matt), Dan and Patty (Serena, Jaylyn, Jordan). We love you!

Obituaries

BOSMAN ALBERT HENRY (BUDD) 72, 4350 NE 13th Terr. Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33334 on May 25, 2011. Survived by his loving wife of 48 years Karen, children Kelli (Mark) Beaudreau, Brenda, and Heidi (Ron) Lieberman as well as 7 grandchildren. Also survived by brother Howard L. (Carmen) Bosman and numerous nieces and nephews.

Church Positions Announcements

YOUTH DIRECTOR, the congregation of the Charlottetown CRC in Prince Edward Island, Canada is prayerfully seeking a full-time Youth Director who is spiritually committed to cultivating the relationship between our youth and Christ and to those around us. Position available August 1st. Experience and training with youth necessary. For more information, or to submit a resume contact Alan McIsaac at (902) 569-3656 or jamcisaac@assembly.pe.ca. Website: www.charlottetowncnc.org.

PASTOR: Maple Ridge CRC is seeking a pastor to eagerly join our staff and lay team with passion and vision for our congregation. We wish to step into the future together with our new pastor to serve one another and the community. We are a multigenerational congregation located in a rapidly growing suburb near Vancouver, BC, just an hour from Regent College. We seek strong Godly relational leadership through Biblical preaching, teaching, and modelling. Proposals from a pastoral team are welcome. Information available at <http://www.mapleridgecrc.com/pastorsearch.cfm>

SAN DIEGO CA CRC is seeking a pastor. We are looking to grow through community outreach and missions. Our new pastor will have a commitment to sound Biblical teaching, faithfully leading us according to God's will. Sermons will be delivered with enthusiasm and sincerity and will be relevant to all age groups. Loving God & our neighbors and joining God in His mission is central to all we do. Check us out at sdccrc.org. For information contact sdccrc.pastorsearch@gmail.com

OAKLAND CRC of Hamilton, MI is seeking a Senior Pastor to lead our congregation. Please send inquiries to oaklandcsrcsearch@gmail.com

FULL TIME PASTOR Phoenix CRC in Phoenix, AZ is seeking a full-time pastor. We are a small congregation located in the central Phoenix area. We desire a pastor who is committed to sound biblical teaching and able to interact with the youth as well as the neighboring community. If interested, or would like to send a resume contact Andy Keizer, search@phoenixcsrc.org, 623-875-5871, website: www.phoenixcsrc.org

YOUTH DIRECTOR Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Listowel, ON. Is seeking a full time YD. We have a strong and vibrant youth program that needs a director beginning Sept 1. To obtain a complete job description or submit a resume please contact Ray Heeres: ray-heeres@hotmail.com, 519-291-2040, or Karen Stolte: 519-291-9739, stoltesfarm@gmail.com

YOUTH PASTOR Are you ready to reach young people for Jesus and help them to develop a strong relationship with Him? Lindsay CRC, Ont. is looking for a part-time candidate with training in Youth

Ministry. For more information please contact Rob Hoogsteen at 1-705-799-3223 or rmhoogsteen@i-zoom.net

PASTOR Celebration Fellowship, an emerging congregation of the Christian Reformed Church is seeking a full-time pastor to lead the ministry to the men incarcerated and released from the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility in Ionia, Michigan. This three year old vital ministry is supported by over 75 volunteers, regional CRC churches and classes. Ordained men wishing to receive additional information or to submit a resume and pastoral profile should contact Glen Van Andel, Steering Team secretary, at: vdcl@comcast.net or (616) 530-8892.

MINISTERIAL POSITION Kelowna CRC is in the beautiful Okanagan Valley of British Columbia and is seeking a pastor to lead our congregation with passion and vision for our church. We are a multi-generational, family oriented congregation. We seek strong Godly relational leadership incorporating Biblical preaching, teaching, and modelling. Contact Karl ksorge@forsons.ca

KIBBIE CRC Kibbie CRC of South Haven, Mich is seeking a full time Pastor to lead our congregation. Contact Halo @ 1-269-637-9491 or E-mail hpolerec@i2k.com

CO-PASTOR/ROLLING ACRES CRC Rolling Acres CRC was founded in Mission & Outreach, & the Vision continues! We are seeking a co-pastor to partner with the pastor of our church. The intention of this co-pastor position would be to continue as our pastor after Pastor Jack Vanden Heuvel's planned retirement in 2013. The Co-Pastor will share responsibility for preaching, pastoral care, and other ministries. Please check our website for information about our church and our community: www.rollingacrescsrc.org. The successful candidate must be a seminary graduate, ordainable in the CRC. Please send letter of application & resume, with references, to: Pastor Search Committee, RACRC, 340 20th St. S. W., Mason City, IA 50401 641-424-1369

FIRST CHRISTIAN REF CHURCH of Orange City, IA (NW IA) is seeking a pastor who will lead us in worship. We are seeking a pastor who will have a commitment to sound Biblical teaching & preaching, showing sincerity, enthusiasm, and relevance to all ages. Please direct inquiries to Bruce Lefever: lefever@orangecitycomm.net (712-395-0730)

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRIES Covenant CRC in Woodstock, ON is seeking a half-time Youth Director to join our Spirit-led Youth Ministry Team. If you have a passion for youth and love the Lord please contact us. Craig Renkema @519-537-3523 or cc.renkema@hotmail.com

BOUWERS, Kornelis (Cor) age 85, 230 East Third Street, Pella, Iowa, went to glory on May 11. Surviving are his wife, Donna (Berghuis Tinklenberg), sons Hans, John, Paul, and Ben; daughters Henriette Bachle, Lisa Brower, Jane Tolsma, Monica Parker, Lori Meyer and Irene Gardner., 42 grandchildren and 42 great-grandchildren. Preceded in death by his first wife, Jannie (Breimer), daughter Karla Van Kooten, grand children Katie & Benjamin Van Kooten, Dylan Bouwers, and Christine Tolsma.

HERBERT (HERB) BRINKS; age 75; May 17, 2011; 1449 Lenox Rd. S. E., Grand Rapids, MI 49506; He is survived by his wife: Ruth, children: Tim and Ruth Brinks, Steve and Gail Brinks, Marie and Kurt Hamersma, John and Ruth Brinks; grandchildren: Derek, Linden, Paige, Ashley, Laurel, Ben and Sadie.

BUTTERMAN, Gertie, nee Sluys, went to be with her Lord at age 92 on May 5, 2011 at Bethany Home, Ripon, CA. Preceded in death by her husband Keith in 1976. Survived by sister Patricia Vriend; children Judy Butterman (Roger Tangri), Hanna Wilson, Bill Butterman, and Case Butterman (Jan Schori); grandchildren Joshua Butterman, Jennifer McCall (John) and one great-grandchild, John Patrick McCall.

DEHAAN JENNIE K (Jackie), age 88 of Orange City, IA on April 26, 2011. Survived by her husband Al; children Connie (Bruce) Lefever, Linda (Marvin) Toering, Dennis (Deb) DeHaan, and Alan (Ellen) DeHaan. 13 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren.

THELMA MAE DE KORNE: aged 92; May 27, 2011; Grand Rapids, MI; She was preceded in death by her husband of 68 years, Baldwin; and great grandson, Kyle Handlogten. She is survived by her children: Kathleen (John) Mezooff, Carol (Richard) Lenger, Janet (Tom) Smies, and James De Korne; 9 grandchildren; 8 great grandchildren; and brother: Paul (Frieda) Grevenoged.

BETTE (ELIZABETH) HARTGER; aged 92; May 12, 2011; She will be missed by Harold, her husband of 67 years; children, Marybeth (Bill) Haverkamp, Jim (Ginny) Hartger, and Harold (Susan) Hartger; 7 grandchildren, 14 great grandchildren; siblings: Sid Lautenbach, Hilda Tuuk, Don (Shirley) Lautenbach, and Helen (Byron) De Maagd.

MRS. KATHRYN S. HEKMAN: age 91; May 28, 2011; 2121 Raybrook S. E., Grand Rapids, MI 49546; She leaves behind her husband of 62 years, Rev. Jacob Hekman; daughter: Carole Holland; grandchildren: Jim Holland, Jacob Holland, and Marnie Redmond; great granddaughter: Alexis Redmon; 2 brothers and 2 sisters.

HOEKSTRA, Dia (nee Vegter) Feb. 15, 1922 to May 15, 2011 Dia (Deah) Hoekstra of Montgomery, NY, born in the Netherlands, now residing with her Savior. Wife of the late William Hoekstra. Member of the Goshen CRC. Lovingly remembered by her children: Jerry & Luc Ottens (Moorefield, ON) Dot a & Ralph Zoppa (Caledonia, MI) Bill & Sue Hoekstra (Montgomery, NY) John Hoekstra (Montgomery, NY) Ron & Donna Gunderman (Wawarsing, NY) Louie & Pearl Gunderman (Port Jervis, NY) 19 grandchildren, 2 great-grandchildren. By her 10 siblings and their families - from Alberta: Barrus, Tony, Edna, Bill, Cor, Tina, Rita; Ontario: Willy; Manitoba: Dessa; Netherlands: Jopie.

JELTEMA-KROONENBERG Katherine, nee Bos, 92 of Denver CO went home to her Lord and Savior on April 5, 2011. She was preceded in death by husband Harold Jeltema in 1983, infant daughter Kathy Ann, husband Clarence Kroonenberg in 2002 and son-in-law Gary Price in 2009. She will be missed by her children, Sharon Price, Jim (Kris) Jeltema, Allan (Kathy) Jeltema, Pam (Dan) Haan, 12 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren and Clarence's children, Dale, Ron, Steve, Carol and their families. She is also survived by twin sister Margaret Buwalda, sisters Jessie Snider & Frances Tracy and brother George (Leona) Bos.

KREDIET Elsie (Hekman) of Ripon, CA went home to be with her Lord, May 5, 2011. She was predeceased by her husband John Krediet, son David Krediet and granddaughter Janelle Krediet. She is survived by her children, Robert (Gretchen) Krediet, Judi Collins, Kathy (Ken) Witt, John (Louise) Krediet, 10 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren.

LENSINK, Arthur John, of Sheboygan, WI, age 94, died on December 9, 2010, alert, sharp and vivacious till the very end. Wife, Nellie, died in August, 2007. Children Sharon (Henk) Ottens, Jack Lensink, David (Sally) Lensink, and Marcia (Tom) Boyd remember Art as a good father, a staunch defender of all that is of good report, a skilled artist, a reveler in God's creation.

LUBBEN, Nellie (Vander Lugt) of Edgerton, MN. age 102 went to her eternal home on Nov. 12, 2010. She was preceded in death by her husband Henry, grandson Robert Millhuff, great-grandson Daniel Lubben, her 4 brothers, and 5 sisters. Survived by sister Christine Lubben, children Henrietta (Sam) Sybesma, Peter (Ann) Lubben, Lois (Harlin) Hanenburg, Ardye (Howard) Millhuff, Marcia (Joe) Harris, Eunice (Dennis) Kallio, Mary (Jim) Hale, Betty (Bill) Kimble, 33 grandchildren, 73 great grandchildren, and 10 great-great grandchildren.

POOL, KATHY (nee Emmekamp), age 58, of Riverside, CA went home to be with her Lord on May 2, 2011 after a brief battle with cancer. She is survived by her loving husband, Rev. Cornelius Pool; children: Karianne (Scott) Kraetsch, Janessa (Steve) Butz, Jeremy (Grace) Pool, Kendal (Katie) Pool, 4 grandchildren; mother, Margaret Emmekamp; 1 sister and 4 brothers.

WILLIAM ASHMAN SANDERSON; aged 87; May 28, 2011; Grand Rapids, MI; Bill is survived by his wife of 65 years, Frances Lyman; children: Collyn and Michael Hawn of Dallas, TX, Sylvia and Gary Hawisher of Newbury Park, CA, Pam and Jim Van Lopik of Grand Rapids, and Bill and Betty (Huizenga) Sanderson of Rockford; 6 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.

SPOELSTRA, MAYME passed away on May 25, 2011 in Everett, WA. She was born May 29, 1918 to Samuel & Alice (Venhuizen) Spoelstra in Clear Lake, MT. Mayme is survived by her sister & brother, Tena Schrier and John (Beryl) Spoelstra. She was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers and five sisters.

VANDENBOS Johanna (Joey Streefman) Platte, SD, 93, passed away May 13, 2011. Survived by sons, Earl (Kathy), Mesa, AZ, Luverne (Loretta), Kempner, TX and Dallas (Jan), Sioux Falls, SD; 9 grandchildren; 13 great grandchildren; sister-in-laws: Lois VandenBos, Platte, SD and Margaret Streefman, Bellflower, CA and many special nieces and nephews. Joey was preceded in death by: her husband, Laurence; 3 brothers: Harry (in infancy), Garrett and Harry James; 5 sisters: Anna Hoving, Cora Pfeifer, Jeanette Dykstra, Louise Beukelman, and Fannie Beukelman; a daughter, Sharon and granddaughter, Stacey Dykstra. We thank God for her long life and Christian witness.

ALMA THEODORA "DOLLY" Vandenburg Van De Weert; age 85; June 2, 2011; 3255 Brooklyn S. E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508; She is survived by her loving husband of 60 years, Barney Van De Weert; sisters: Marjorie Adams and Mary Anderson; children: Margaret Vorndam, Anne Dieleman, Barney Van De Weert, Garret Van De Weert, Susan Vanderploeg, Mary Stough, Leslie Grodesky, Amy Bedford, Steven Van De Weert, their spouses and 19 grandchildren.

VANDER TUIG, Gerald; age 79; May 3, 2011; Gerald was preceded in death by Esther, his wife of 53 years; his parents, George and Josie Vander Tuig, and brothers, Mitchell, Wilbur, George, Jr. and Kenneth Vander Tuig. He is survived by his daughters: Beth (Doug) Brink and Julia (Kevin) VanDenBosch, grandchildren: Aimee and Curt Brink, Meagan, Katie, and Sara VanDenBosch; sisters: Jessie Koelewyn and Sylvia Vlieger.

VANDER ZEE, RALPH. Age 96, of Lynden, Washington went home to heaven, May 9, 2011. He was preceded in death by his wife, Jeanette, of 68 years. He will be missed by Vern and Ruth Vander Zee, Sheryl and John De Jong, Laureen and Floyd Leo and Marcia and Les Mulder, ten grandchildren, 6 great grandchildren, by many nieces and nephews, and by many friends. "The Lord is my shepherd." Ps. 23:1.

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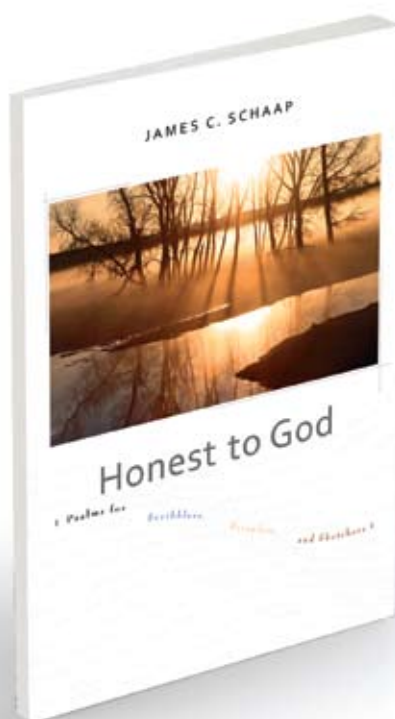
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Our Theology of Denominational Governance

WE emphasize the theological significance of the local church.

THANK YOU SO MUCH for the excellent lengthy set of reflections, including the helpful historical summary, regarding denominational governance (“Denominational Governance: Time to Get Back to Reformed Basics,” June 2011). I have watched these developments from a distance in recent years and share your concerns.

I fully agree that the time has come for the Christian Reformed Church to launch “a more fundamental study,” with a focus on “a Presbyterian/Reformed way of doing church.”

The one thing I would add to that assignment, however, is the need for serious attention to the theology of the church. Polity has to be based on careful ecclesiology, and new explorations in this area are desperately needed, with special attention to our own strand within the Reformed-Presbyterian community.

We must carefully keep in mind that our version of the Reformed tradition has always viewed polity and doctrine of the church somewhat differently than the Presbyterians and other Reformed groups.

A key reason for that is our strong traditional emphasis on the theological significance of the local church.

As the Scottish historian Alastair Duke has pointed out, “The Calvinist churches in the Low Countries, as in France, came into existence as individual congregations: the presbyterian or synodal framework followed”—a pattern that is somewhat different from Scottish Presbyterianism, in which the idea of a strong “national church,” organized along the lines of a parish system (inherited from the Catholics and Anglicans), was present from the beginning.

Our “localist” impulse has meant that many of our forebearers refused the language of “higher” and “lower” assemblies, noting that the Synod of Dordrecht itself avoided such terminology. Rather, they preferred to speak of “broader” and “narrower.”

Abraham Kuyper is a case in point. Here is a pithy comment by him: “The Synod does not stand above the Churches; rather, the Churches stand above the Synod. And over both is God’s Word.” On this view, as another advocate observes, the authority of broader assemblies is “fundamentally different from the authority the consistory has over the congregation—which is an ‘official’ kind of authority, by virtue of the office of the officebearers. . . . The major assemblies are not ‘higher authorities.’ A major assembly is just an assembly of delegates from a larger number of churches. But this does not cause their authority to accumulate.”

As a member now of a mainline Presbyterian denomination, I have been pleased to see the PCUSA move—albeit

as a kind of pragmatic drift, without much theological depth—in a more decentralized direction, while the CRC has gotten increasingly “higher-lower.” Much irony in this!

We would do well to think together, as the heirs of Kuyper, about what all of our past theology of the church means today for the exploration of adequate structures for Reformed denominational life. ■



Dr. Richard J. Mouw is president and professor of Christian philosophy, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif.

Punch Lines

What has made *you* smile lately? Got a joke or funny incident you'd care to share with your wider church family? Please send it to *The Banner* at 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560; or email it to editorial@thebanner.org. Thanks!

On a family vacation many years ago we visited the Hell's Gate Tram in the Fraser Canyon, British Columbia. Admission was free for children 5 years old and under. As we paid for our tickets, the attendant said to our youngest daughter, Mona, "You're free!"

"No, I'm not," she replied promptly, "I'm 4!"

—Joanne Meyles

As my son, Greg, and I listened to a Reformed sermon, the preacher emphasized his point about legalism, saying, "Anything that ends in *-ism* is a bad thing." I leaned over and whispered to Greg, "I guess that includes Calvinism."

"Yeah," he whispered back, "and catechism."

—Bob Loerts

During the church service, we sang a hymn that concluded, "Gladly, the cross I'd bear." Later my 6-year-old daughter, Kristen, remarked, "I don't know why we had to sing about a cross-eyed bear."

—Alma Kramer

Two pastors who were touring Germany together visited a nearby church on Sunday. Because they didn't understand the Ger-

man language, they decided to sit behind someone and mimic whatever that person did. Shortly after the service began, the pastor looked their way and said something, after which the man in front of them stood. The visitors stood too, but when they did so the congregation laughed, and they were terribly embarrassed. After the service, the pastor explained that a new baby had been born, and he had asked the father to stand.

—George Vander Weit

Many years ago all CRC pastors followed the same format in worship services: prayer, singing, Bible reading, sermon, offering, singing, and so on. One Sunday, however, our pastor switched things up a bit. Our family was discussing this over dinner when our 8-year-old son remarked,

"Yeah, I didn't know when to eat my peppermint."

—Mrs. A. Dykema

Our pastor was preaching a sermon titled "EPIC." He'd asked one of the seventh-graders to read related Scripture passages on cards with the letters *E-P-I-C* printed on the back so the congregation would see the visual.

When the pastor called the young man forward to read, the student stood up immediately. However, he remained rooted where he was, occasionally looking down at the floor. Finally, after the pastor called him forward once more, he hobbled to the front of the church. The congregation's laughter certainly reached EPIC proportions. His younger brother had tied his shoelaces together.

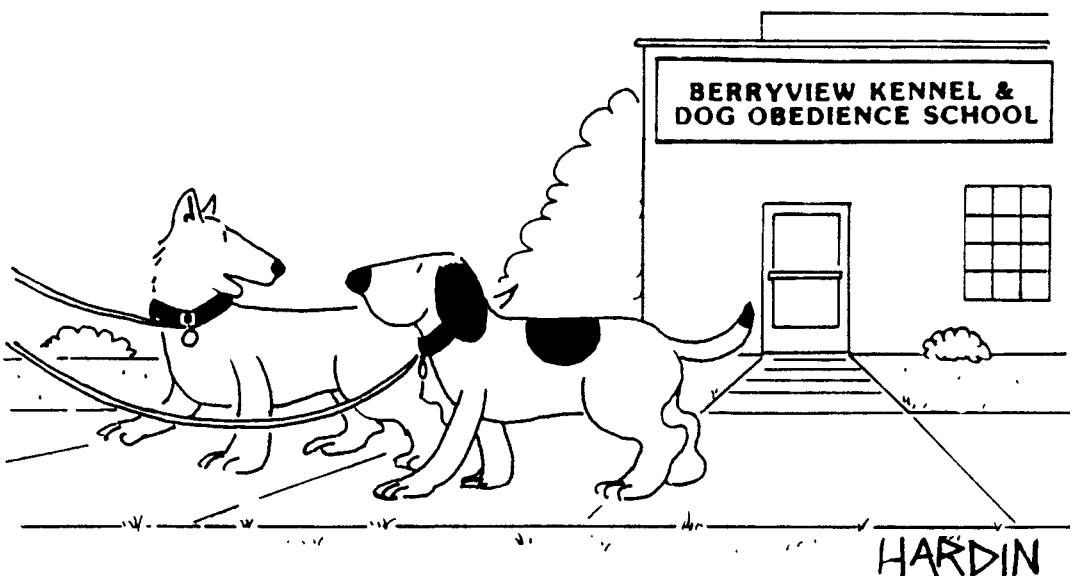
—Irene Brink

My mother loves to travel and often goes on day or weekend trips. One day, while my parents were visiting, we read our family devotions from the book of Genesis. We hadn't realized how much our children had noticed Grandma's traveling until our 8-year-old announced, "Grandma has moved more times than Abraham!"

—Sharon Bean

One day I answered the phone at the Light of the World Prayer Center. The salesperson calling asked to speak with the owner. I replied, "You can talk to God anytime!"

—Bev Sterk



"I did well on the spoken commands, but that essay question took me by complete surprise."

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