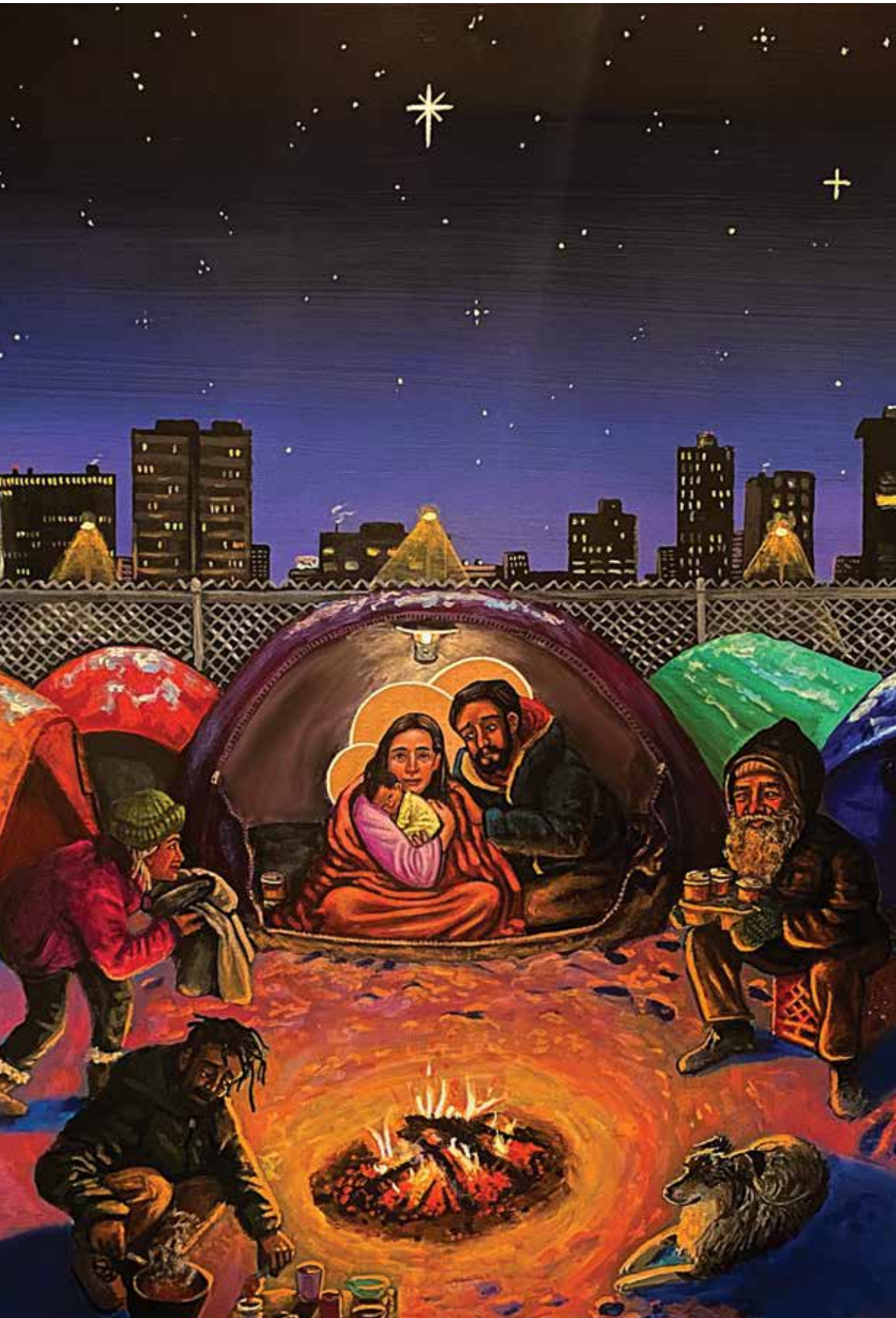


CHRISTIANCOURIER

Theme: Christmas & Belonging

Christ-centred. Creative. Canadian.



“Tent City Nativity” by Kelly Latimore. According to one government survey, every night 17,000 people experiencing homelessness are unsheltered in cities across Canada. Roughly one third find community in encampments.

HOMELESS JESUS

At St. Patrick’s church,
downtown,
where Homeless Jesus
sleeps on a park bench at the
corner,
they handed out
their one millionth free meal
to Robert, who was next in line.
He’s been coming for ten years.

It started with sandwiches
passed through the living room
window
of the rectory, and graduated
to breakfast and a hot lunch,
made
in a state-of-the-art kitchen,
newly set up in the school next
door,
using fruit, vegetables, eggs
and honey,
grown or raised on their own

farm,
which they bought because
they’re in this for the long haul.

The very long haul. Or,
as the Bishop put it, “The need
is great,
and hasn’t abated at all.”

On so many levels,
a free lunch doesn’t solve the
real problem,
but meeting your neighbour’s
bodily needs
is a kind of concrete
thing to do,
that makes the world a million
times
not-worse.

By John Terpstra
from the collection Some People (2024).

END SASKATCHEWAN COAL

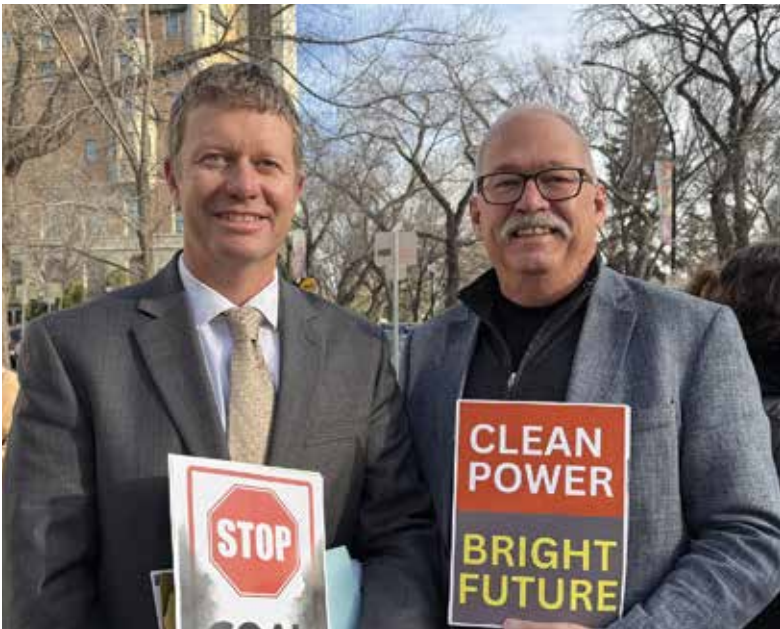
Suing the government over coal is an act of worship.

Maryo Wahba

ON NOVEMBER 10, a Saskatchewan court held a justiciability hearing with big implications on the future of coal burning in the province. Five months earlier, on June 18, Saskatchewan’s Minister for Crown Corporations Jeremy Harrison had informed SaskPower staff that the province would ignore the federal Clean Electricity Regulations and keep coal “a pillar” of the electricity grid. Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) subsequently launched a legal challenge to stop the province from burning coal for the next several decades. CPJ’s co-applicants include the Saskatchewan Environmental Society and three neighbours from the Prairies: 12-year-old Kiké Dueck, Sherry Olson, and Manitoba farmer Matthew Wiens – everyday people who shouldn’t have to go to court just to insist governments follow the law and protect children’s futures. The judge’s decision on the November 10 hearing is expected before the end of 2025.

Continued on page 2

COAL CONTINUED



Glenn Wright (left), the counsel representing the applicants, and Willard Metzger (right) of Citizens for Public Justice, one of the civil society applicants, outside of the Court of King's Bench on November 10.

To add insult to injury, Saskatchewan's decision contravenes two federal laws: the Coal-fired Electricity Regulations and the Clean Electricity Regulations. Saskatchewan has said that they "do not recognize the legitimacy of the federal Clean Electricity Regulations," and the federal government has essentially given them a pass on doing so by signing an equivalency agreement that ostensibly lets them keep burning coal. This situation is unfair to those that have already done their part – like Ontario, which completed its coal phase-out by 2014, and Alberta, which ended coal power in 2024, five years ahead of schedule.

Saskatchewan also entirely bypassed public consultation. The coal announcement was not made to the public but delivered internally to SaskPower employees. On top of that, the province is setting aside \$900 million to refurbish coal plants – investments at high risk of becoming stranded assets if Canada meets its climate goals.

LIVING LITURGIES

It's hard to imagine Jesus being litigious, but worship can take all kinds of unlikely forms. For instance, he was rather forceful in his worship when he went into the temple to dramatically remind people that it was a place of worship, and not a marketplace.

In my own experience, I've seen worship happen in surprising forms, too. Growing up in

Egypt, where I was baptized in an Orthodox church, I found that people didn't necessarily need to understand words of worship to take part in it, as much of the liturgy was in Coptic, a language most congregants didn't understand. Later, at a Catholic parish, I learned that one heartfelt hymn could be as valuable as five prayers. These experiences prompted me to ask the question: what makes something amount to an act of worship?

Decades later, as a law student and Climate Justice Policy Analyst at CPJ, I find myself returning to that question: Can a legal challenge qualify as worship? What frame of mind would we need to take on for it to be so?

As I realized after joining CPJ, worship isn't only what we sing on Sunday; it's the public love of our neighbours that we practice every day. Coal-fired power generation is among the most harmful ways to produce electricity, contributing disproportionately to the climate crisis and local air pollution that worsens heart and lung disease and drives hundreds, if not thousands, of premature deaths. Renewable energy, on the other hand, creates sustainable jobs, affordable electricity rates, and avoids preventable suffering.

CLIMATE RISK & REALITY

The facts are stark. Saskatchewan has some of the highest per-capita greenhouse gas emissions in Canada, despite Southern Saskatchewan having huge solar and

wind potential. And Canada itself ranks among the world's heaviest per-capita emitters. If this sounds like abstract policy talk, remember: it shows up in hospital wards and on farm fields. It shows up in the air a child breathes on the way to school and in the bills families pay when governments chase yesterday's fuel instead of tomorrow's solutions. It also shows up in the witness of the church.

CPJ's own story is shaped by Christians who believed public justice is a form of worship: Gerald Vandezande, our co-founder and Member of the Order of Canada; and John Olthuis, a CPJ co-founder appointed to the Order of Canada in 2023 for decades of Indigenous rights advocacy, including work around the Berger Inquiry and the Mackenzie Valley pipeline moratorium era. That lineage reminds us that faithful public engagement can change the trajectory of a country.

Fast forward to today. Youth litigants in *Mathur v. Ontario*, a case in which CPJ is acting as an intervenor, won a pivotal Court of Appeal ruling that sent their Charter case back for a new hearing on the merits. And just last month, Ecojustice helped launch a case alleging Canada Pension Plan Investments is mismanaging climate risk – because fiduciary duty, too, must reckon with reality.

So, yes: being an applicant in a lawsuit against the government is an act of worship, even if it isn't a typical form of worship, and even if it doesn't take place in a typical worship venue. It is not meant to antagonize the province but to tell the truth in public, to protect vulnerable neighbours, and to call those in authority to keep the promises they've made. If that resonates with your understanding of discipleship, I invite you to keep this case in prayer and learn more about clean-energy options in your own community. In a season when it's tempting to settle for performative leadership, let's worship through the collective hymn of public justice instead. ✨



Maryo Wahba

Maryo is Climate Justice Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice and a law student at the University of Ottawa.

RE-ENCHANTMENT IN TORONTO

Live music, cake, *klompen*, subversive poetry, peppermints, laughter, one impromptu hymn, a few surprises and two standing ovations at CC's 80th anniversary conference. | Jenna Boone



"WE CAN ONLY PROPERLY DO REDEMPTIVE JOURNALISM if our eyes are open to the dangerous times around us." This statement from Brian Walsh was just one of many profound moments during *Christian Courier's* 80th anniversary conference on October 18. Walsh said journalism should center around the act of homemaking, and if the scene in the cozy conference room at the Toronto Metropolitan University was any evidence, *CC* has certainly nurtured a home throughout these 80 years. Along with the Institute for Christian Studies, which ran a concurrent conference, we explored the question: How do we re-enchant the world?

IT BEGINS WITH HOPE

In that conference room, where giant posters of *CC's* front pages throughout the decades adorned the walls and encircled the community within, hope resonated. Sylvia Keesmaat kicked off the sessions by exploring moments throughout the Bible in which God meets his people in the wilderness, naming enchantment as the place where humanity and creation live together. Walsh found hope in music that rises up against injustice, paying tribute to Bruce Cockburn, Leonard Cohen and Bruce Springsteen. Deborah Bowen and Noah Van Brenk led a lively interactive workshop on the redemptive prose of *Poetry in Place*, a creation-focused anthology of poetry. Allan Romkema brought the charming setting of Grace Manor alive, and Sam Sunder-Singh took us back in time with a Beatles song. Board Chair Jim Dekker thanked various *CC* community members and former columnist Lloyd Rang



Some of *CC's* staff and Board (more than usual in one place!).



Sylvia Keesmaat.



Sam Sundar-Singh.

reminisced on the generations that have formed the publication. At the end of the day, a panel of writers, including Mary Kooy, Mary Guldemon, Ineke Neutel and Ron Kuipers standing in for Arthur Boers, each read memoir excerpts, prompting thoughtful discussion about the Dutch immigration experience.

In unique ways, each session showed how hope exists everywhere around us.

ANGELA'S GOODBYE

In late afternoon, a standing ovation followed the farewell speech of our dear Editor Angela Reitsma Bick, who has guided this publication since 2009 with skillful writing, a passion for justice, and a deep heart for God's kingdom. As a surprise, her kids had collected comments from appreciative readers and handed over a "Letters to the Editor" booklet, adding, "Mom hasn't seen any of these. That means they're *unedited*." That the goodbye was bittersweet speaks to the home Angela has nurtured for *CC* readers all these years.

THE B.C. M&MS

Following Angela's goodbye, Meghan Kort and Maaïke VanderMeer – lovingly dubbed "the M&Ms" by columnist Heidi VanderSlikke – were welcomed as *CC*'s new co-editors. Expanding *CC*'s editorial hub beyond Ontario to the coast of B.C., they will certainly continue to encourage hard discussions and nurture belonging in the pages of *CC*, just as Angela has, which is no small feat in our rapidly changing world.

It was a packed day full of rich conversation over coffee, meals and ideas. "Well organized and Christ-centred," said Ed Wivoet, who attended with his wife Denise. "Bert and Alice would have loved it!" A fitting tribute to this small but mighty publication which has, for eight decades, worked on homemaking in the face of challenging times. ✈



Jenna Boone

Jenna, *CC*'s Digital Editor, is working towards a Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Studies with a focus in English from the King's University in Edmonton.



Angela Reitsma Bick.



Brian Walsh

Prayers of Thanksgiving, Blessing and Commissioning

Excerpts from a liturgy written by Brian Walsh

For the Word of love that calls and upholds all of creation,
we give you thanks.

For your Word of Life that does not return empty,
we give you thanks.

For the Word made flesh in Jesus,
we give you thanks.

For words that upheld a community,
gave witness to the Word embodied in our lives,
and continue to bear the fruit of faithfulness,
we give you thanks

For these 80 years of *Christian Courier*
for the liberating of the imagination,
the healing of souls,
the education of the church,
the outreach to this country,
we give you thanks.

For a place of story-telling,
a gathering place,
a place of laughter and debate,
of solace and hope,
we give you thanks.

For Paul De Koekkoek,
the founding editor of *Christian Courier*;
for all the faithful editors over the years,
John Vander Vliet and John Vellinga,
Ad Otten, Dick Farenhorst, Keith Knight, Bert Witvoet,
Marian VanTil, Harry der Nederlanden,
Brett Alan Dewing, Michael Buma, Angela Reitsma Bick,
we give you thanks.

For faithful and courageous board members,
and for all creative writers, editors, designers,
and all of our staff over the years,
we give you thanks.

For Angela,
who kept the vision alive,
deepened the meaning of redemptive journalism,
expanded the vision,
strived for healing in an increasingly a divided
community,
who struggled against the odds,
who served us so faithfully,
we give you thanks.

WE WERE RIVETED

Angela Reitsma Bick

"WHEN I BEGAN WRITING THESE STORIES," Romkema told the rapt audience at *CC*'s 80th anniversary, "I just wanted to listen to the kind of conversations that happen when the coffee is hot and the past is far away yet close at hand. I came to realize that what emerged was something more layered – a kind of quiet theology of aging, memory and friendship."

Romkema, later dubbed the Stuart McLean of *CC* by Brian Walsh, hummed one line of the hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" as part of his reading, and the crowd responded by spontaneously humming or singing the next line. It was a holy moment. (The full story is on page 6, and I recommend humming along when you get to that part.)

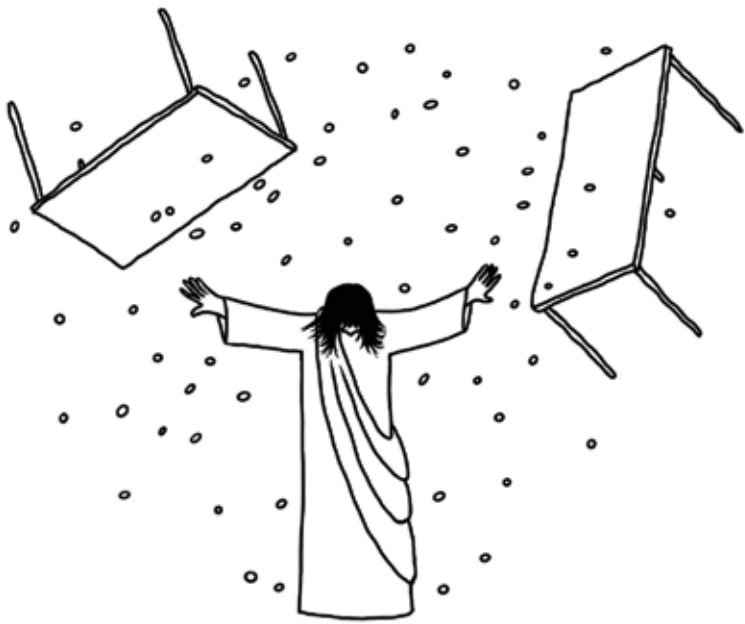
"These are stories of affection," Romkema said, "for the church, for its questions, and especially for the people who keep showing up, mugs in hand, still listening."

GOOD TABLES



Angela Reitsma Bick

This is Angela's last editorial as Editor of CC but not the end of her writing career. You can find her on Substack and at angelareitsmabick.ca.



David Hayward, the Naked Pastor.

SINCE *BLESSED ARE THE UNDONE* CAME OUT, I've been invited to talk about faith deconstruction in classrooms, board rooms and churches – and once, maybe fittingly, in a working art studio, where every surface had a layer of colourful grit.

At the All Canada Summit in Kitchener, Ontario, on November 7 (see page 24), I wore a T-shirt my kids had given me. It was after lunch when someone said, "I've been trying to read your shirt all day, and all I could see was, 'Don't sit at tables'!"

The second half (and I admit, it's a lot for one torso) was, "that Jesus would have flipped."

"What tables *would* Jesus flip today?" a man came over after my workshop to ask. It was a good question.

"Trump's banquet table," I said. "His crazy Halloween feast. That one for sure. Basically, any table where people of power make plans that exploit or harm the powerless." This was one week before the Epstein files came out linking Trump to the sexual trafficking of children, and somehow *is still President*. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil," as Isaiah says plainly (5:20).

Any other tables need flipping? I could have added pulpits where the language of faith is used to dress up xenophobia. Platforms where misogyny flourishes. The tables underneath the papers being signed by politicians – in Canada and in the U.S. – cutting humanitarian aid. Maybe also Bruxy Cavey's desk, as he starts a new church where all donations go directly to him. "There is a path for repentance and redemption for abusers," to quote Mennonite pastor Jonny Rashid, "but it starts with wholeness for victims, not with fundraising for a new ministry."

By any number of metrics, we are living through a crisis of Christian witness in North America. In the face of that crisis, there's a time for discussion and debate – and a time to stand up and act. A time to face the decisions that negatively affect vulnerable people while followers of Christ are silent.

But I have to admit that I hesitated to even wear that shirt. We live in weird times. The Church has become so divided that even relatively mild statements feel risky.

It's "mild" in the sense that I was not wearing it with plans to incite an actual table-flipping army. I wore it because I think it's too easy to forget our own tables of privilege and ignore the core of the gospel

while we sit there. And I include myself here. As I've been nudged out of the comfortable seat of Writer to Person With A Microphone, I've been forced to think a lot about how we got here, and healthier ways for faith communities to function. But even those conversations are only possible if we escape polarized extremes and re-engage on some common middle ground.

COMPETING NARRATIVES

Historically, the Reformed tradition has contained such a wide spectrum of positions that once, years ago, a colleague who edited a publication for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church said, "I don't know how you do it" – meaning, how you retain *Christian Courier* readers from all sides. Truthfully, I haven't managed that, not perfectly, though it's hard to know what "perfect" in this case would even look like. I can say, broadly speaking, that over 16 years of my time with CC the centre has shifted towards the Right, politically speaking, while space in the middle has shrunk – and not just in the Christian Reformed Church. In areas where I was once considered a moderate, I'm

now labelled progressive; and space for individual discernment and thoughtful debate – in families, at universities, in ecclesiastical governance – is nearly gone. I miss the voice of the moderates. Without them, all we have left is schism.

I remember another time when I noticed the absence of the moderates. When I was a brand-new Editor, one columnist wrote every month on the threat of Islam to the Christian faith. He covered accounts of forced conversion to Islam, the risks to Christian missionaries in Muslim-majority countries, and Christian converts who had been persecuted and killed.

I remember arguing over the efficacy of that focus. As always, I wanted the problem put in context. How much does the average Christian in Canada know about the Islamic faith? What does this angle add, and what's missing? Was the danger truly greater than it had been 10 years ago, or did we merely perceive it that way after 9/11?

THE CRISIS DE JOUR

In grad school, I had a good friend who was Muslim. She invited

our family to her mosque at Eid, where everyone welcomed us and did their best to make us feel at home. That one small experience was invaluable later, when I debated with this columnist about whether *all* Muslims believed that part of the Qur'an saying infidels must die. My friend, at least, did not. It helped me begin to distinguish between extreme and moderate Muslims. But it did feel, in the early 2010s, that not enough moderate Muslims were speaking up. Maybe they were afraid. From the outside, it seemed the radicals like Osama bin Laden and ISIS were running the show. Now, more than a decade later, for better or for worse, Islam rarely comes up in CC's pages at all. One recent piece highlighted the persecution of Christians in Pakistan, but there's not the same sense that Islam is an immediate threat to the Christian faith (or life), at least not here in Canada.

Now the threat is secularism. Or fundamentalism. Or immigrants. Name your issue and you can find Christian groups divided over it, climbing hill after hill to die on over it. Making *that one thing* the litmus test of faith, the defining feature in their narrative.

And I still struggle to put things in context (the task *Blessed are the Undone* gave itself). What is at the root of our ecumenical battles? Is Danger [fill-in-the-blank] truly greater than it used to be, or is it merely perceived that way?

Some days, I feel overwhelmed by the layers of complexity in the world and my own finite knowledge. But other days, the core of the gospel rings as clear and true as it ever has. And it doesn't seem complicated at all.

Feed the hungry. Welcome the stranger. Care for those in need.

All of that happens at tables, too.

This Christmas, go and fetch that extra leaf from storage. Wiggle the sides of God's table out, and it will split right down the middle – which might be just as disruptive as being flipped, and I apologize for that. Be patient. It'll look as good as new in a minute.

Pull it wider again, until there's space for everybody to find a spot. Drop that extra leaf into place.

A good table was made to extend beyond what seemed possible. ✨



Angela Reitsma Bick.

WHAT'S NEXT, AFTER CC?

If the Canadian church had its own version of CBC radio's "Canada Reads" (we could call it the *Sunday Edition*), which contemporary books would you put on the list? Well, I've picked five to get the discussion started! They're the core of a brand-new online course I'll be teaching through the Institute for Christian Studies starting January 2026, open to "lifelong learners" (which is to say, anyone!).

I'll also be doing more speaking gigs related to *Blessed are the Undone* throughout the winter, and I plan to start sharing my writing through Substack, a good option for any CC readers who'd like to stay in touch.



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Christian Courier's independent Canadian journalism inspires action, builds community and influences culture for Christ

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IN TWO CENTURIES

I would like to congratulate *Christian Courier* on its 80th anniversary! I appreciated working for CC as a journalist from 1994 till 2003. Yes, I worked for CC in two centuries! I worked in the St. Catharines office with such memorable staff as Stan de Jong and Bert Witvoet.

I wish you and the rest of the current CC staff and contributors God's best blessings as you continue the legacy of *Christian Courier* and Reformed Faith Witness.

Alan Doerksen

Publications Editor, *Intercede International*

A PRAYER FOR THE FUTURE

It's been such a gift to participate in the mission of this mighty publication over the years, both personally and professionally. CC fosters a space of generous, warm and open conversation, all the while helping its readers to see the manifold ways God is at work in Canada and beyond. I cherish the ways it has nurtured the ties that bind us, and pray that it will continue to do so for years to come.

Brian Bork

Former CC columnist and Review Editor, now with Resonate

SPIRITED AND DEEP

Christian Courier abounds with personality. I get the feeling that staff meetings would be fun, spirited and deep. That shows through in the paper, which is no small accomplishment.

CC also creates a sense of community. To read is to step into a circle of thoughtful, caring, connected people.

I'm part of a different denomination, but *Christian Courier* makes me gaze over the fence at the grass on your side. Congrats to the current staff [on 80 years], and much gratitude to those who laid the foundations earlier.

Will Braun

Editor, *Canadian Mennonite*

DECADES AS A TEACHER-WRITER

I was six years old when, in June 1947, my parents and their five children (six more were later added) emigrated from Berkel, Zuid Holland, to Morpeth, Ont. Early copies of *Calvinist Contact*, *Christian Courier* and *The Christian School Herald* were welcome in our house, putting us in touch with our new homeland in both Dutch and English.

The 1950s and 1960s were a time of unprecedented growth in the Reformed Christian community in Canada. During these years, I embarked on a teaching career and deeply enjoyed working with Bert Witvoet as Associate Editor of *The Christian School Herald*.

During the 1970s and 1980s, CC articles filled my need for deep spiritual and intellectual nourishment. I completed a doctoral program, then returned to the work I loved most – leading a staff of dedicated Christian teachers at Mt. Vernon Christian School. It was during that season of life that I contributed a series of articles to CC entitled “Worlds Apart.”

I am strongly convicted that for me, as for all of CC's writers, the way of Jesus touches our hearts and minds, empowers us in our community-building and makes our world a better place. My heartfelt thanks to the writers for keeping the readership well informed and responsive to God's call!

Reinier Ray Klapwyk, PhD

TO THE NEXT GENERATION

We (likely) began our CC subscription shortly after we got married in August 1974. Both of us recall that our parents read it regularly. So we subscribed because it was familiar and we enjoyed it. And we certainly enjoy and appreciate CC now!

Margaret and Nick Van Dyk

FAVOURITE COLUMNISTS

Congratulations on 80 years of continued publishing! I appreciate learning about all sorts of different issues. I really like Sara Pot, Katie

Munnik and Curt Gesch's columns – simple, everyday goings on in our world and our community. I really appreciate it. I'm now in my 80th year, and I've been reading *Christian Courier* since the 1970s. I appreciate all the work you do.

Margaret Vanderwal

A HERALD OF THE NEW CREATION

The *Christian Courier* community is my spiritual home, more so than any other community. To me, CC is a messenger, a herald of the new creation, a community seeking the Kingdom in every sphere, longing for Heaven's demonstration here on earth. I belong; this is my home, these are my people.

Yet I do not think CC is a comfortable echo-chamber. Fears, doubts, disagreements are openly stated, yet staff, writers and readers are on the same team – team Jesus. Each issue explores, “What is the Word of God for our time and place? How do Christians speak prophetically to this age, today?”

CC has shaped me, but I am also blessed to have contributed, occasionally, including an editorial in February 2020, a critique of contemporary celebrations of life services (“It tolls for thee”), and an article in 2014 retelling our family's experiences of same-sex attraction. Both submissions received much affirmation. I am grateful! I belong.

Nick Loenen

Richmond, B.C.

ACROSS THE STREET IN APELDOORN

We enjoyed reading Julia Sinke's description of her trip to the Netherlands (“Parents, tell your children,” Nov. 3). We were there too, standing across the street from Princess Margriet. A highlight for us was when the princess spontaneously began a chorus of “Happy Birthday” for the Canadian veteran who was celebrating his 100th birthday that day at the parade.

Bruce Bos & Sharon McLean

QUERIES ABOUT AUTISM

I read “Mothers are not responsible for autism” by Rudy Eikelboom (Nov. 3) with interest. If not mothers, would fathers be? I am [also] wondering whether you came across any studies relating to any connection of autism with aspartame. I know that aspartame does something to the brain because I get a severe headache (also a bad taste in my mouth) whenever I drink any diet soda.

I also find it rather interesting that when I was young, the condition of autism was virtually unheard of but today it is so prevalent. Clearly something has changed.

CC reader

RUDY RESPONDS

As I said most (if not all) of the increase in the diagnosis of autism is due to the broadening definition we now use for Autism Spectrum Disorder and the better tools available to doctors to diagnose it.

Most of the causes for autism (80 percent) seem to be tied to the parents' genetic background – not something we control. So it's not something to blame mothers or fathers for. Researchers have looked for environmental factors and have not found any that seem to have a significant impact on the incidence of autism. What studies there are (like the 2023 study in *Nutrients* by SP Fowler and others, showing in a retrospective study – which is open to memory problems – that drinking aspartame is associated with an increase in male autism but not in female autism) have been hard to replicate.

U.S. autism research has received an extra \$50 million to explore both genetic and environmental factors in causing autism, so we may have a better understanding in the future.

Finally, I am not an expert in the area discussed in most columns, but I do depend on people who are experts, usually found in the scientific literature. In the case of many mental health issues, however, we have a long history of incorrectly blaming mothers. So this is a pattern that needs to be corrected immediately when it happens again.

Rudy Eikelboom

THE WIND THAT BLOWS OUR SAILS

Stories from Grace Manor: Part 6.

Allan Romkema



WE'RE BACK IN OUR CORNER OF GRACE MANOR. We sit in our usual spots, with our coffee mugs on the table – our own mugs, since we've decided to be eco-responsible and bring them from home. Douwe has an orange mug that says: *Pake: the man, the myth, the legend*. The rest of us, except for Broekie, have plain old mugs. Broekie's mug has a picture of *Het Wapen van Broek op Langedijk*. His birthplace coat of arms shows two men in a sailboat.

"How is that a coat of arms?" Douwe asks, pointing to Broekie's mug. "Two guys in a sailboat? What's that supposed to mean?"

Broekie chuckles. "They're not just two guys. Look closer – see the sou'westers?"

"Fishermen?"

"Villagers," Broekie says.

Douwe leans in. "Still doesn't look very official."

"It's a mug, Douwe," Broekie says. "And it's about spirit – two men facing forward, into the wind. They're on a journey."

"Like Ulysses," Bill adds.

Broekie lifts his mug. "Yes, about setting out, even when you're old, even when people say you should stay home."

Douwe glances back at the mug. "So what, this is . . .?"

"My hometown," Broekie says. "Determined folk. Heading out, whatever the weather."

Mary comes up behind Broekie, waits for him to finish, then raises the thermos. "Do you men want your coffee hot or cold?"

Broekie lifts the mug with a grin. "To striving and sailing. Fill me up."

"Yeah," says Jan Piersma, pointing at Douwe, "and give him pea soup in his orange mug."

"More stuff for the legend," says Pete.

We laugh.

We hold out our cups for Mary to pour that Douwe Egberts gold.

THE HEART, NOT THE PRAYER

After our first sips Pete says he heard about a diner in North Carolina that gave customers who prayed out loud a 15 percent discount.

Bill nods, resting his forearms on the table. "Yeah, that's true," he says, "Mary's Gourmet Diner made headlines for it a while back, but they stopped the practice." He shrugs. "I think the idea was to encourage faith, which is fair." He glances out the window, then back at Pete. "But Jesus seemed to care more about the heart behind the prayer – whether you're alone or in a crowd, it's not about putting on a show."

Pete takes a sip of coffee. "You know, I was thinking about our Confession of Faith – remember last week? That question about prayer: 'Do you pray?'" He leans back and exhales. "It's been bothering me. Like a question to check off."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," Broekie says. "We always answered that one so quickly – of course we pray, morning, meals, bedtime, church. But sometimes I wonder. . . was I really praying, or just reciting the usual lines?"

"It became a rhythm," Bill says. "Predictable, familiar. Not wrong, but . . . safe. Prayer turned into something we performed rather than something we entered."

Pete murmurs, "There were words, lots of words . . ."

"I think we learned prayer like we learned our catechism – questions to answer, strong on facts, light on mystery," Broekie replies.

Bill looks down at the table. "We grew up with beautiful table

prayers, and they meant something. But over time, I think we stopped asking if they still opened our hearts. They became . . . punctuation . . . a beginning, an ending. Not so much a conversation."

Pete sighs. "Maybe it's not that it changed. Maybe we long for something deeper."

Douwe shifts and sets his mug down with some force. The table gives a small thud. He doesn't say anything.

Now Jan leans forward, opening his mouth once, then again. His eyes search for the words. We wait – quietly, patiently – because we know when Jan wants to speak, it matters. He sits at the edge of his chair and raises his hand. "Yes, and we always pray at the table, asking God to bless our food and other things . . . the kingdom come . . . and . . . and hallowed name?"

We look at Pastor Bill. His smile deepens.

"Yes, Jan," he says. "We say those words so often, that we forget to hear them."

Broekie lifts his mug. "Thanks Jan, for reminding us," he says. He reaches out to touch Jan's arm.

A PRIVILEGE TO CARRY

Now Broekie continues. "Do you guys remember the prayers our fathers said at the table?" He puts down his mug and folds his hands. For a second, we aren't sure if he's about to pray right now. "My father," he says, looking up toward the ceiling, "my father would pray: '*O, Vader, Die al 't leven voedt, Kroon onze tafel met Uw zegen.*'"

He lets the words roll off his tongue: God crowns the table with his blessing . . . His hand is gentle . . . He strengthens our soul . . . He guards us from excess."

"Beautiful," Bill says.

Broekie continues: "*O, Heer, wij danken U van harte, voor nooddruft en voor overvloed.*"



"Bruhs canoeing at Coot's paradise" by Alicia Looyenga.

Lord, we thank You from our hearts, for hardship and for plenty.

We fall silent.

"We've lost something," Pete says. "I love the sound of *nooddruft en overvloed* but I don't remember what *nooddruft* means."

"An old Dutch word for poverty," Bill says. He takes a slow sip of coffee, then traces the rim of his mug. "I remember visiting a church member in Nigeria. Her son offered me half of his sugar bread – all they had for lunch. And still, they prayed similar words: for need and for abundance."

He looks around the table. "It stayed with me."

No one speaks.

Then he turns to Pete. "Go on."

Pete nods. "These two verses talk about our relationship with our food, with our neighbour and with God. I love it."

"It was part of the table prayer church culture," Bill says.

"Mother Teresa," Broekie says, "Mother Teresa was once asked what she says when she prays. She said, 'I don't say anything, I listen.' Then they asked what God says to her, and she said, 'He doesn't say anything – he listens too.'"

Douwe tips his chair back. "How can you pray without words? Isn't prayer about speaking to God?"

Then Pete says, "Be still, and know that I am God."



Allan Romkema reading Grace Manor 6 at CC's 80th Anniversary.

Douwe shakes his head.

Bill leans forward. "From the table prayers of our fathers to the silent prayers of our hearts – maybe the culture isn't gone, it just changed its voice."

The doors of the dining hall swing open. It's Trynie. Her eyes go straight to Jan. She waves. "Has he been a good boy?" We look at Jan. He grabs Douwe's orange Pake coffee mug from the table and lifts it for Trynie to see. "Look what I found!" he shouts. His knees knock the table as he scrambles to his feet. He clamps the mug with both hands, and with outstretched arms, he and his beloved stroll toward the doorway.

Douwe sits back and laughs.

We all laugh.

Now Pete hums a familiar tune. We recognize it right away.

What a privilege to carry . . .

Broekie lifts his mug and looks at the coat of arms again. The two figures in the boat, their backs to the wind, pressing forward: striving, seeking . . . not yielding.

He nods slowly.

"We're still on the journey," he says. "And prayer . . . it's not lost. It's still the wind that blows our sails."

We sit for a moment, holding our mugs – letting the words settle like the last sip of coffee. 



Allan Romkema

Allan has navigated the intersection of his Frisian, Dutch, and Canadian identities since arriving in Canada in the early 1950s. The November CC included an excerpt from his memoir, *Where is Here*.

HISTORY RE-WITTEN

Reformists and Anabaptists choose grace over grievance, and move from division to unity.

Chris Pullenayegem

AFTER THE 1517 REFORMATION, the relationship between mainstream Protestant Reformers and Anabaptists was characterized by bitter hostility and systematic persecution. What began as theological disagreement escalated into violence that would define centuries of Christian division.

At the conflict's center lay a seemingly simple question: when should Christians be baptized? While reformers like Luther and Calvin retained infant baptism as the foundation of Christian society, Anabaptists ("re-baptizers") demanded adult believer's baptism. This wasn't merely ritual preference – it challenged the very structure of Christendom, where church membership equaled citizenship.

In 16th-century Europe, the Anabaptist position carried revolutionary implications. By rejecting infant baptism and embracing pacifism, Anabaptists appeared to create a separate society within existing political structures. Their refusal to bear arms or swear oaths was interpreted as sedition by both Catholic and Protestant authorities.

Rather than recognizing Anabaptists as fellow Protestants, mainstream Reformers branded them dangerous heretics. Calvin's Geneva, Zwingli's Zurich and various Lutheran territories systematically imprisoned, exiled and executed Anabaptist believers. The persecution was justified theologically as preserving Christian unity and politically as protecting legitimate government.

A REMARKABLE REVERSAL

Fast forward to August 2025, in Richmond Hill, Ontario. In a small church, history quietly rewrote itself.



Congregations from two denominations that started worshipping together in a shared space joyfully celebrated three young adult baptisms as one community.

Two years earlier, a declining Christian Reformed (CRC) congregation began sharing worship space and time with a small emerging Anabaptist community. Though they separated physically for their times of teaching, they united in worship and providing leadership in youth ministry and community engagement – an experiment in kingdom unity transcending denominational boundaries.

Significantly (500 years since the origins of Anabaptism), Sunday August 10 marked something extraordinary. In a joint service, Community Church (CRC) and Mosaic BIC (Brethren in Christ) baptized three young adults by immersion during the worship service. The very

issue that had sparked centuries of violence became a source of profound unity. No dogmatic posturing, no ritual disputes – simply two traditions acknowledging their oneness in Christ and celebrating young people's commitment to follow Jesus.

The baptismal waters that once divided now united. In a small corner of God's kingdom, the barriers history had erected crumbled before the simple truth of shared faith. Where 16th-century Reformers saw heresy, 21st-century believers found harmony.

Perhaps this is how healing happens – not through grand theological reconciliation but through ordinary believers choosing unity over division, grace over grievance. In that Richmond Hill sanctuary, God's smile was almost visible as his fractured body experienced a moment of beautiful wholeness. ✨



Chris Pullenayegem

Chris is Lead Pastor at Mosaic BIC Church in Richmond Hill, Ontario. Formerly, he was with the Christian Reformed Church Home Missions in Canada, and Director of Leadership Development with the CRCNA.

DEAR UNCLE GARY

A Grade 12 student asks adults in the Church to consider mentorship. | Joseph Wang

I'VE NOTICED THAT MANY CHURCHGOERS YOUR AGE aren't involved with the youth at all. Everyone assumes that young people will just keep coming back every week, even though the stats show a steady decline in Canadians engaging in religion. The number of people proclaiming their faith has declined from 90 percent in 1985 to 68 percent in 2019, according to one study. Uncle Gary, we need to explore the question of why young people still attend church and understand what we're doing right.

At my church, young people who attend usually begin with our youth ministries before going to church on Sundays. It's easier to attend youth group because of the community they have there – friends and youth leaders. I want to focus on the youth leaders here. My youth leaders not only cultivated a sense of belonging for me but also for all my crazy questions.

Jesus also answers his disciples' weird questions. He is the best biblical (and historic) example of what mentorship should look like. For three whole years, Jesus sits, eats, explains and spends time with his disciples. After his ascension and the Holy Spirit's arrival, these same disciples, who were quite young (scholars say the youngest may have been 13 years old), go on to start and lead the early church. The disciples never could've done this without Jesus' mentoring.



THREE HOURS A WEEK

A big problem at my youth group is that it's hard to feel close with our leaders because there are so many of us. I've seen people, forgotten and unknown, slowly cycle out and stop coming. It's like Jesus says: "The workers are few, but the harvest is plentiful."

That's why I'm writing to you. You're super welcoming, patient and biblically literate. Furthermore, you have experiences and wisdom that no one else can bring. I remember the time I fell off my bike; you found me crying and hurt and you instinctively started praying for me. That really modeled what living out faith was for me.

Here is my request: I would like to ask you to come help with my church's youth ministry. Yes, it is a big commitment. Gen Z looks for consistency in adults, and this will take up to three hours weekly. But think of the ways you'll see God move, the lives transformed by God through your faithfulness. Maybe this is what is meant when Jesus said that our faith could heal us. Not that our faith has the power to heal wounds or blindness but rather it puts us in the position to let God do his work.

Pray and reflect on this, on the gifts God has given you, the experiences, perspective and wisdom that you've been through and learned. Then take up the role or decline; it's up to you.

Peace and with much love,
JJ ✨



Joseph Wang

Joseph (JJ) is currently a student in the greater Vancouver area. He is very sociable and loves to cook and listen to music.

THE TECHNO-THEOLOGY GAP

What shapes ministry more: the gospel on the stage or the machine behind the curtain? | [Jordan Nobel](#)

SINCE ITS START, THE CHURCH HAS BEEN CHANGED by new technologies – from the printing press to cars. But the rate at which those changes are coming has quickened from centuries to decades to days. Previous generations had years to understand new technology. Now, AI tools to help pastors are coming out almost weekly, and that’s just the beginning. Executive pastors wonder if the next new facility tech will make things cheaper, more reliable and more accessible. Youth pastors adapt to new social media platforms by the season. Name a church problem and there’s a custom solution, available by annual subscription. But when a basic question like “How can I tell if my church really needs this?” goes unanswered, can we really say we are wisely shepherding our congregations through these changes? Churches in Canada are overdue for some self-reflection about the influence of technology on ministry.

This is especially important because few resources exist to train pastors in what you might call biblical technical literacy. Seminaries and Bible colleges don’t teach it. Common practices about discerning the Holy Spirit through technical change seem few and far between, an afterthought compared to more “spiritual” things like ministry or programming. Most of the Christian books in this area focus on personal use – the technology in our homes. But very little has been written about how churches interact with technology.

WHAT IS TECHNOLOGY?

One fundamental problem of the techno-theology gap is a narrow definition of technology. Technology is not just your church’s sound system, Wi-Fi network and website; by some interpretations, almost *everything* about how we operate is some form of technology.

Last year, for the first time ever, the Lausanne Movement published an in-depth look at church technology, which it defined as a tool, a process, a culture, a spiritual artifact, and “as shaping, or shaped by, culture.” In *From the Garden to the City* (2011), John Dyer says, “technology is the human activity of using tools to transform God’s creation for practical purposes.” To that, Tony Reinke adds that “technology is applied science and amplified power. It is art, method, know-how, formulas and expertise” (*God, Technology and the Christian Life*, 2021).

So technology is not just a tool for work. It’s also what users do around the tools. Like a shepherd can’t be separated from the staff or sheep or flock, and the fisherman can’t be separated from the net or boat or marketplace, today’s pastor is wrapped up in the technology of the modern church.

THREE CATEGORIES TO CONSIDER

Here are three distinct categories to start with: First, ministry and spiritual formation technologies that Christians use in everyday life for personal spiritual growth, like a printed Bible, an app on your phone or a Bible study curriculum. Second, liturgical technologies involving the worship life of the church, including everything from sound systems to instruments and even music notation itself. And third, operational & administrative technologies that support church management and operations, ranging from physical materials like buildings, parking lots, bulletins and chairs, to digital resources like a Wi-Fi network, accounting software and communication platforms.

These technology categories highlight some of the materials at the heart of modern churches. But if we consider the broader true definitions of technology, we realize that almost everything and everyone involved in the church, from the musicians to the ushers, accountants, and



landscapers working outside, are a form of technology.

If we haven’t identified the rest of these things as tools for ministry, how can we see them through a Christian lens? If we can’t see them, how do we lay them at the Lord’s feet? And if we are not offering them to the Lord for his purposes, then what are we using them for?

Without a theology that helps us use technology as Christians, churches risk becoming just another shopping mall where the product on the shelf happens to be Jesus Christ.

MY JOURNEY INTO CHURCH TECH THEOLOGY

My own history with technology comes from working in churches and working in the music industry. I have managed the technology at some of the biggest concert venues in Canada and toured with artists across America. I have also worked in pastoral and operational roles at some of the biggest and smallest churches in both these countries. The COVID lockdown in 2020 was my first opportunity in many years to pause from working in live events and church services. I rediscovered my passion for reading. I was introduced to authors like Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman and Jacques Ellul.

More recently, a local Bible college asked me to teach their sound technology course in their pastoral leadership program. The course syllabus showed that it was essentially the same introduction-to-sound course that I had taken 15 years earlier. My first reaction was, “Bible colleges still don’t have more to say about technology?” After so many years in and out of church leadership positions, I certainly did.

With some reworking of the course scope around a broader definition of technology, I was able to find a more practical angle to help future pastors who will inevitably be overseeing some form of technology. The syllabus was updated to include learning goals like “Appreciation for theological principles that apply to Christian use of technology” and “Equipping worship leaders to think deeply, wisely and quickly across church technologies,” as well as “Knowledge of technology’s impacts on the biblical, historic and modern church.”

FUNCTIONAL DUALISM

We need theology to ground our use of technology in the church. Without it, we risk technology forming our beliefs, rather than our beliefs forming our technology. Ignoring this leads to a sort of functional duality where we become laser-focused on the spirituality of ministry but

let technology define our physical ways of operating. Technology creeps into the ministry and structures it around whatever the technology requires.

We have seats and a parking lot; therefore, we must fill them.

We have staff, therefore we must generate tithes to pay them.

We have money, therefore we must use it to the maximum of productivity.

We have a livestream, so we must have ever-increasing viewers.

Incrementally, as technology grows in the church, the philosophy of ministry slowly changes from shepherds caring for sheep to managers using machines to create products. We become more defined by what technology does rather than what God says. Pastors turn into decision-making managers, making technical measurements of efficiency, productivity and cost vs. value.

I am not suggesting that pastors should go to business school for better business training. What I am asking is, when technology defines how we work rather than our theology, who really is lord of the congregation?

Technology tells us to be faster, build momentum, constantly improve and become more efficient.

Jesus tells us that patience, slowness and inefficiency should be our method.

Technology says that more visibility, more content, and increasing connection is the way forward.

Jesus says that anonymity, isolation and silence are to be valued.

Technology values bang for the buck, lowering expenses and increasing output.

Jesus says that generosity, extravagance and wasteful resource use are just and can even bring honour to God.

So will it be technology that defines our churches?

Or Christ? ➤



Jordan Nobel

Jordan is Head of Project Management at the Canadian Centre for Christian Charities and a current Fellow at Cardus NextGEN Fellowship. He lives on Keats Island, B.C. with his wife and three young children, and spends his time exploring the outdoors and enjoying island life with his family. This article is part 1 in a series.

OUR NEED TO BELONG

God is with *all of us*, wherever current fractures in the Church leave us. | [John Van Sloten](#)



Polaroid of John and his son, Edward.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, MY FATHER gave me a copy of our family tree going back seven generations. It was quite grounding to see where I came from and how I fit in.

Interestingly, our family genealogist (a distant relative in the Netherlands) chose to include two important pieces of information alongside many of the names – the person’s vocation (baker, baker, baker, blacksmith. . .) and the *church office* that they held (deacon, deacon, deacon, elder. . .).

Clearly, I was born into a family that placed great importance on church membership. As a minister in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), I felt a deep gratitude for the faithfulness of my forebears.

Which is why the decision I am now facing feels so weighty.

Even though I am not officially pastoring a church right now (I’m retired), I find myself out of sync with the recent changes of the Christian Reformed church and am wondering what to do with my ordination. Given its current doctrinal rigidity, I can no longer be a faith leader in my denomination. If I was asked to sign on today, I couldn’t.

So does this mean I need to cut ties?

The possibility seems unthinkable to me. It breaks my heart. Where would I go? What do I do with all of the good memories? How will I find my place again?

This is where I’ve always belonged.

EVOLVED TO BELONG

It’s hard to describe, but there is something about this decision that seems bigger than my cognitive capacity to process it. It’s not about simply weighing the facts and choosing. It feels more like a dismantling of who I really am. Being a part of the CRC is intrinsically tied to my identity.

This is how belonging works – we connect to something and that something shapes us. This connection is so important that our bodies have developed early warning systems to alert us to its absence.

And according to Duke University researcher Dr. Mark Leary, “The

fact that human beings evolved an arsenal of mechanisms that respond to real, potential and imagined losses of acceptance and belonging supports the notion that being valued and accepted was exceptionally important throughout human evolution.”

Human beings have always needed to belong. God built that capacity in all of us.

God knew that to be fully ourselves, we need to be seen, found worthy and respected. When we feel anxious, lonely or depressed – capacities that can be genetically passed on from our forebears – we give evidence to the fact that we’re not meant to be alone. Negative experiences like these are relational alarms that warn us that things are not as they should be.

Maybe this is why I’ve felt so much stress recently. Not only have I retired from a job where I was deeply connected and always belonged, but I’m also about to potentially disconnect from generations of forebears who called the Christian Reformed church home.

A FUNERAL

Earlier this fall I attended my aunt’s funeral via zoom. It was held in a traditional Christian Reformed church. When I saw the photos of my aunt and uncle, cousins and grandparents on the memorial slideshow, I felt a deep nostalgia well up in me. As I watched my family walk into the sanctuary and fill the front pews, and as I listened to the old hymns, with their theologically rich and Reformed lyrics, playing on an organ, I felt a bit homesick.

This is the church that formed me.

I couldn’t help but smile when the pastor announced that his sermon would be based on Psalm 46. This was my grandfather’s (a deacon and a baker) favourite psalm.

And I found comfort as my cousin read the psalm and recited these words of belonging; “The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (vs 7 and 11).

Psalm 46 makes the point that no matter what happens in life – if the earth gives way or the mountains fall into the heart of the sea – God is with us.

Even if the church rejects you, and you feel lost and alone and maybe a bit fearful that you may be the one who is not seeing things right, God is still with you.

God is with all of us in the Christian Reformed Church – wherever this current church fracture leaves us.

I have a sense of comfort when I remember that the Christian Reformed church itself was the product of a series of church schisms going all the way back to the Reformation period.

We belong to God regardless of the fracturing that results from our theological certainty.

It took a family funeral to remind me of these truths.



John's dad Evert as a young boy with his dad, Jan Van Sloten, in front of the family bakery in Wezep.

What made my aunt's service so meaningful for me was seeing how many church pews were filled with her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. So much fruitfulness and faithfulness born out of one life.

God is always faithful – even when the church sometimes acts the way it does, and we sometimes act the way we do.

We belong to God no matter what.

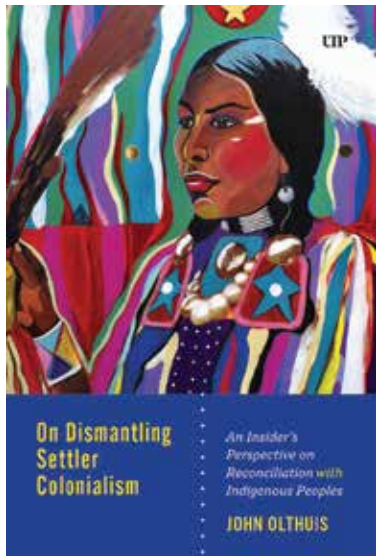
And belonging was the final word at my aunt's funeral. Before singing the closing hymn, the pastor asked everyone to stand and say out loud the words of question and answer one of the Heidelberg catechism: “Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death? A. That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.”

We belong to Jesus, no matter what happens. ✨



John Van Sloten

John is a Calgary-based community theologian, writer, and (at present) ordained minister in the CRC. His most recent book is *God Speaks Science: What Neurons, Giant Squid, and Supernovae reveal about our Creator*.



**ON DISMANTLING
COLONIALISM: AN
INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE
ON RECONCILIATION WITH
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

John A. Olthuis,
University of Toronto Press, 2025.

DISMANTLE! DISMANTLE! DISMANTLE!

Kathy Vandergrift

IF YOU WONDER WHY PROGRESS ON Indigenous reconciliation seems slow, Olthuis' new book provides an explanation. If you think reconciliation has to mean more than land acknowledgements, it adds substance. If you wonder what you can do to advance reconciliation, it offers an ambitious yet achievable action plan. And, if you enjoy reading behind-the-scenes accounts of historical moments, you will enjoy this book.

John Olthuis shares what he learned during 50 years of working with several different Indigenous groups in this memoir/treatise/call to action. He brings a unique perspective as someone present at negotiation tables and in courtrooms, as legal counsel or advisor to Indigenous leaders – when major decisions on their land claims were made. His study complements Indigenous writers by specifically addressing the role of non-Indigenous actors and how non-Indigenous Canadians can live out treaty obligations. In addition to highlighting unfinished business, he provides a timely, principled framework for current issues, such as what Indigenous title to land means in reality, how it relates to individual ownership of land, and what role Indigenous people should have in proposed national projects.

FASCINATING REAL-LIFE STORIES

The main substance of this book is fascinating stories behind seven major Indigenous cases in Canada, from the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Moratorium in the 1990s to the long struggle for the 2024 modern treaty with the Innu People in Newfoundland and Labrador. Olthuis starts by learning the Indigenous story and then strategically uses his lawyer skills to create space for Indigenous voices to be heard in hostile spaces, such as National Energy Board hearings or meetings with hardened federal and provincial officials. Sometimes progress is surprising, and other times it is painstakingly slow. Each story illustrates what reconciliation could mean for both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous communities if barriers rooted in 19th-century colonialism were removed.

While each story is unique, there are some common threads – such as appreciation for the persistence of Indigenous leaders, grounded in love of this land, which breaks through obstacles that seem insurmountable. Progress is often made when Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices pursue complementary goals, such as the Dene land claims and the Just Energy Policy campaign in the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline story, and the preservation of old-growth forest and Teme-Augama Anishnabi land claims in northern Ontario.

These stories reveal that the major obstacles to settling land claims are not unreasonable Indigenous requests; it is often the rigid unwillingness of government officials to consider reasonable options that leads to decades of delay and obstruction. For example, after 50 frustrating years, the Ontario government is finally starting to clean up the mercury deposited in the English-Wabigoon River that runs through the lands of the Grassy Narrows community, instead of protecting the polluter, the Reed Paper Company. But Ontario still refuses to budge on the Grassy Narrows land claim, limiting progress – one example of the high cost of delays and obstruction for Indigenous peoples and for Canada.

THE REALITY OF RECONCILIATION

Many stories highlight how provincial governments are blocking progress toward genuine reconciliation, which could be unknown to many Canadians. While advocacy often focuses on the federal government, more attention is needed to change provincial postures and positions.

On a more positive note, Olthuis spotlights how private companies are finding new approaches to co-management of land and resources through Impact Benefit Agreements. Canada has more than 600 plans that give Indigenous people some control over land and more ability



Author John A. Olthuis.

to determine their own futures. Research shows that the conditions of Indigenous people are improving in these areas, in stark contrast to the general lack of progress in the living conditions of most Indigenous people more than a decade after governments promised reconciliation. Olthuis regularly reassures readers that non-Indigenous people do not need to fear Indigenous control of land and self-determination.

Reconciliation needs to go far beyond the rhetorical land acknowledgements that have become common in Canada. Olthuis builds on the cumulative developments of the last four decades to propose a path for closing the gap between the promise of reconciliation and the reality of continuing settler colonialism and assimilation.

Central to this is recognizing the difference between reconciliation with Indigenous people and reconciliation of Indigenous people to the dominant society. As Olthuis points out, much that

is called reconciliation is really assimilation. Genuine reconciliation means change for non-Indigenous people, as well as Indigenous people, to find new ways to co-exist and co-manage the land and resources for future and present generations. Olthuis' positive examples show the benefits of genuine reconciliation for both sides.

According to Olthuis, Indigenous people need to clean up their own act and dismantle the barriers put in the way of Indigenous people – people who want justice, not charity. While listening to Indigenous people is essential, it should not be up to Indigenous people to change harm they did not create. The plea to non-Indigenous people is to correct wrongs committed – wrongs that Olthuis shows readers with painful clarity, so they cannot be dismissed.

John Olthuis reveals why now is the time for the non-Indigenous community to step up and play an active role. There has been a major shift in public attitudes



(l to r) Olthuis, Yvette Michel (Assistant to Innu Nation Deputy Grand Chief Nui), Innu Deputy Grand Chief MaryAnn Nui, and Innu Nation Grand Chief Etienne Rich on the public release of a Canadian Human Rights Commission Report on the Human Rights of the Innu of Labrador in 2021.

between the explicit assimilation in the 1969 White Paper and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The recommendations in the many well-documented reports in the last decade give clear action steps. The challenge is to mobilize non-Indigenous supporters to insist that governments who represent them remove the barriers to reconciliation – to be as persistent as Indigenous people have been and continue to be, on both federal and provincial levels.

STEPS FOR LASTING PROGRESS

Olthuis proposes four big but achievable steps for genuine reconciliation. First is settling land claims and giving land back to Indigenous people so they can pursue their own development, in keeping with the original treaties. The book provides evidence to show that there is enough Crown land to honour existing land claims without expropriating property owned by individuals. Shortage of land is not the problem. The barriers are the in-

sistence on control by federal and provincial governments.

The second step is dismantling the federal government departments that trap Indigenous people in costly, wasteful, micro-managed programs with poor outcomes. Conditions are not improving, in spite of large budgets, writes Olthuis, because paternalistic attitudes don't give people agency in their own development. More benevolent colonialism after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is still colonialism. Dismantling current bureaucracies and transferring services and control to local communities, along with dismantling the Indian Act, has been logical for some time; getting it done remains a challenge.

The third step is full implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A serious implementation plan will need the creation of new mechanisms to work across federal and provincial jurisdictions.

Fourth is revising the mandates of regulatory bodies to give as much priority to impacts for



(l to r) Celeste McKay, Professor Donald McRea, John Olthuis, Innu Nation Deputy Grand Chief Etienne Rich, Innu Nation Deputy Grand Chief Mary Ann Nui, Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation Chief Eugene Hart, Yvette Michel and Marie Claude Landry in 2021 on the release of the Canadian Human Rights Commission on the Human Rights of the Innu of Labrador.

Indigenous people and the environment as to economic and fiduciary concerns. This step is essential for the fast-tracking of national projects proposed by Prime Minister Carney. Non-Indigenous support of Indigenous calls for this will be critical to making progress, as it was with the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline.

This action plan is not easy to achieve, but Olthuis' stories can

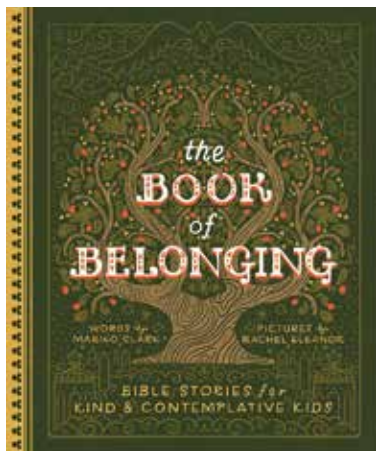
inspire readers with examples of working together to achieve progress. True, lasting change will take persistence – the kind that many Indigenous leaders have shown. If every person who has made a land acknowledgement takes another step to insist on settling land claims, that part of the plan could move forward and start a shift that replaces assimilation disguised as reconcili-

ation with genuine reconciliation. That would be a good end to the Olthuis story. ✈



Kathy Vandergrift

Kathy, a public policy analyst, brings experience in government, social justice work and a Master's Degree in Public Ethics to her reflections.



THE BOOK OF BELONGING: BIBLE STORIES FOR KIND AND CONTEMPLATIVE KIDS

Mariko Clark (Author),
Rachel Eleanor (Illustrator),
Convergent Children's, 2024.

HELPING KIDS SEE SCRIPTURE'S VISION OF BELONGING

Adele Gallogly

THE BOOK OF BELONGING IS A GENTLE AND IMAGINATIVE collection of Bible stories for children shaped by the belief that God welcomes and cherishes everyone. In her introduction, author Mariko Clark addresses her young readers and shares her hope that they will know, "God is trustworthy, and God's names for you are true. You Belong. You are Beloved. You are Delightful." These words set the tone for a book centered on inclusion, tenderness and belonging within God's expansive love.

This collection features 42 stories drawn from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Each story includes the characters' original Hebrew names (Moshe for Moses, Mhanah for Hannah, Yeshua for Jesus etc.). Several stories focus on women, including some often overlooked in children's Bibles. One example is the Old Testament story of five sisters – Makhlah, No'ah, Khaglah, Milkah, and Tirtzah – whom Moses advocated for after their father Tzalafkhad (Zelophead) died. "The rules in those days said that only a male could keep his father's things," explains Clark, "So without a brother, the girls felt their layers of belonging start to slip away." Framing like this reminds readers that the desire for justice has always been part of God's story and provides valuable context for some barriers to belonging.

Throughout the book, Clark's attention to sensory detail and human emotion brings a fresh perspective even to well-known passages. The account of the angel Gabriel coming to Mary, for instance, begins: "Miryam (Mary) was a collector. Not of stones or feathers or coins but of memories. Lovely moments were uncommon in a life like hers. A poor teenage girl engaged to a poor carpenter from a poor tiny village in the grip of the new Roman power machine." A few pag-

es later, the story of Jesus' birth opens with, "Snores and snuffles filled the cool night air as a flock of sheep snuggled in the grass. In the distance, the city glowed and grumbled." Such vividness grounds readers in the world of the story, allowing them to notice and appreciate the small details of ordinary life.

Designed for ages six to twelve, *The Book of Belonging* is an accessible resource for family reading, classroom use or a church setting. Younger children, with guidance, may also enjoy the book and will likely enjoy Rachel Eleanor's vibrant illustrations, which aim for historical authenticity and celebrate the diversity of God's children.

At the end of certain stories, Clark offers short sets of questions and statements (a "Wonder Moment" or a "Mindful Moment") that prompt readers to connect biblical themes to their own ex-

periences – paying attention to exclusion, naming injustice and nurturing a sense of belonging. In one of these moments, she states that: "anytime we read the Bible (or anywhere!), it is a helpful practice to ask ourselves, *Whose story is not being told?* This is a chance to use our imaginations in a holy and compassionate way."

The Book of Belonging is a carefully crafted, spiritually rich resource that invites children – and the adults who journey with them – to read Scripture with curiosity, empathy and the confidence that every person belongs to God. ✈



Adele Gallogly

Adele is CC's Review Editor. In addition to books, she also enjoys podcasts, including Elamin Abdelmehmoud's new CBC show, Commotion.



Ron Greidanus, age 11, at the first piano his parents purchased for him; top right, at age 5, with his Kindergarten teacher, and at age 20, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Stratford Ont., after a solo performance of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto.

WHEN BELONGING IS NOT GUARANTEED

Growing up gay and Christian Reformed in the 80s. | [Marlene Bergsma](#)

RON GREIDANUS was born with the twin gifts of being prodigiously talented and being gay. But being born in the late 1960s, the fifth child of six to a hard-working, modestly-educated farm family in the Dutch immigrant community in Huron County, Ontario, it would take a long time before he could accept both of those gifts.

The musical talent was easier. In fact, his career as a church musician, which started when he was still a teenager, became the pathway to belonging for Greidanus, who is now an accomplished and beloved concert pianist, soloist, harpsichordist, choral conductor and music director.

HAPPY CHILDHOOD

Overall, Greidanus says he had a happy childhood. He wasn't a strong student at his local Christian school but he loved living on a farm, and even today, living in Southern Ontario, he takes on seasonal work for a local farmer, throwing bales during haying season.

"Some of my happiest moments on the farm were with my mother and my aunt on the hay wagon, and I still work for a farmer occasionally," he says. "I enjoy the physicality of it. I've been doing it for 20 years, throwing enormous amounts of hay."

His mother recognized his musical talent early and arranged for piano lessons. An excellent piano teacher, Mrs. Lear, lived on the next

concession, just a bike ride away.

He always knew his mother and sister adored him, and the aunts, uncles, and cousins in his large extended family enjoyed his precociousness and the ways in which he fit in well with adult conversation. Greidanus was only beginning to understand the ways in which he might be different from his siblings or the other boys in his class, but he looks back on his childhood and considers it mostly normal.

ABUSE

Yet from the time he was an adolescent, there was something more sinister going on. As Greidanus was attempting to reconcile his sexuality with both his family and their Christian

Reformed faith, he was dealt a more tragic hand. Someone within his immediate circle recognized his vulnerability and began sexually abusing him, abuse that continued throughout his adolescent years. It made his journey towards wholeness and authenticity even more fraught, and although he did confide in another adult, this was before adults in positions of authority had the duty to report crimes of this nature.

"You get used to it," he says. You cope by "getting numb to it."

Today, Greidanus would say he has moved on. He never followed up. His abuser has never been confronted or held accountable.

Greidanus expects it will stay that way.

BEING BULLIED

The abuser was not the only one who made Greidanus a target.

When he was ready for Grade 9, his family's financial situation led his parents to decide they couldn't afford to send him to Christian high school, so he was enrolled in public high school. By now, his sexual orientation was something he recognized but did not dare admit. In Huron County in the 1980s being gay was not something you talked about. At church and in his family, it was understood that homosexuality was a sin that jeopardized your salvation, "sending you on a spaceship to hell." At school and at summer camp, it made him a target. He was bullied relentlessly.

He was called "homo" and worse, and told his name was "Rhonda not Ron."

"If I wanted to go into the science class, I had to wait for the teacher, otherwise I'd be spat on, kicked, punched, named every horrible name under the sun," he recalls. "So yeah, it was tough, and the aftermath of it is terrible – the

stress it puts on kids and the effect on their growth and development. I just had to learn to be resilient.”

A PROMISE

But his high school also offered hope. A notice from the Huron Centre – a youth mental health agency – invited students to sign up for free sessions with a school counsellor. Greidanus did.

At his first appointment, he begged the therapist: “Please help me to be not gay.”

I was being given that huge gift, to accept my homosexuality.”

UNLIKELY HOPE

Despite the bullying and fear of damnation, Greidanus says there were other glimpses of hope.

One came from an unlikely place – the pulpit of Clinton Christian Reformed Church. For a short period of time in the 1980s, Rev. Homer Samplonius preached sermons that raised the topic of homosexuality. Greidanus can’t

Composers to find other tunes by Bach. Somehow, he sensed music “would be my ticket out of Huron County.”

It also made him popular.

He was the star of his elementary school when he played “Star of the East” at the Christmas concert in Grade 8, and by the time he was 15 years old his mother had found a job for him as church organist at St. James’ Middleton Anglican Church. The income from the church gig helped pay for music

and Greidanus’s beloved instrument, worth over \$25,000.

But his friends and fellow musicians rallied, launching a GoFundMe campaign to raise enough money to replace it, showing him a circle of love in a way that had not been part of his Christian Reformed childhood.

For Greidanus, the acceptance and support he has found in the Anglican and musical communities are life-giving. He is appreciated for both his musical talent

“I mean, the math and the DNA shouldn’t really add up, but Mrs. Lear was literally a bike ride down the farm road around the corner. It was great. She shouldn’t have existed that close to me, but I was given this amazing gift that allowed me to flourish. Making that early connection to classical music was so strong, I have to believe that also was a gift from God.

“And that is why when I feel doubtful, or get despondent, I



Ron Greidanus directs the Georgetown Bach Chorale at a recent rehearsal.



Her reply?

“Ron, I can’t help you become not gay because you are gay. But I am going to help you learn to love yourself.”

The idea was so shocking, he wept.

“I was just crying and crying, probably for 10 minutes. And I said, ‘Please stop, don’t say this.’”

But the counsellor also made a second promise. If Greidanus kept coming to see her, “by the end of the year, you will be in a very different spot.”

He kept going back and his parents never knew or suspected. And miraculously, she did help him begin to accept himself, which helped him survive.

The abuse and bullying “could have been fatal,” Greidanus says. “I could have been another kid who died by suicide, and there were days I wanted to,” but the presence of that counsellor is proof, for him, of God’s love.

“When you have people coming into your life exactly when you need them,” it’s evidence of God’s providential care, he says. “It was such a pivotal point in my life, but

remember exactly what was preached, but he remembers it as being life-giving.

“He made it clear that this God that we celebrate is not that judgemental God that is being shown to us,” Greidanus recalls. In this preacher’s sermons, Greidanus heard evidence of “people with open minds and loving minds and embracing arms. It opened me to much healthier possibilities.” The mere suggestion of acceptance gave Greidanus hope. He wasn’t invisible. He might be worthy of love. Being gay was something that even ministers could talk about.

MUSIC AS ESCAPE

While Greidanus was still busy with the hard work of coming to terms with his sexuality, his musical talent was another gift that helped him survive.

“I was in Grade 6 when I fell in love with Baroque music,” Greidanus says. Singing hymns in church from the blue Psalter Hymnal, the Baroque melodies and arrangements made him come alive, and he searched the Index of

lessons with a music professor at the University of Western Ontario in nearby London, which became a pathway to a university degree in music at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and graduate school at the Sweelinck Conservatorium in Amsterdam, where he studied piano performance.

Greidanus came back to Canada in 1998 and moved to Georgetown, Ontario, where he founded the Georgetown Bach Chorale and eventually became the director, accompanist or music leader at five other choirs and churches. Now, he makes his favourite kind of music every night of the week, and regularly performs around the globe.

COMMUNITY

In June 2024, he was preparing for a Toronto Beaches Chorale concert at St. Anne’s Anglican Church in downtown Toronto. The day before the event, he delivered his custom-made harpsichord – “my baby” – to the venue so it would be ready for the afternoon performance. A devastating overnight fire destroyed the church, countless works of art,

and who he is. He doesn’t have to hide his identity or pretend to be someone or something he isn’t.

“It amazes me that there are other people in the world who want to do what I do,” he marvels.

Greidanus, whose parents have both died, never doubted his mother’s love in particular. She probably suspected he was gay, especially because he had confided in her about the schoolyard bullying, but it was a topic she would not broach.

“Her favourite show was *Three’s Company* and she loved Jack [who played the role of a gay roommate], but she was never going to have a son who was gay,” Greidanus recalls. When he did come out to her, after his father died in 2006, she pretended to be surprised and might have thought he was “going to hell,” but her love for him did not wane.

GOD’S LOVE

Greidanus knows his musical talent is a gift from God, and the fact there was an “extraordinary” music teacher near his childhood home is part of that gift.

think of those things and know there is a bigger picture. I am not world famous; I am just doing my thing in my little, wonderful world, but I am doing my part.”

Some of that means simply being himself and doing what he loves.

He also wants parents and pastors to know that all “kids need to know they are loved, regardless of dogma.”

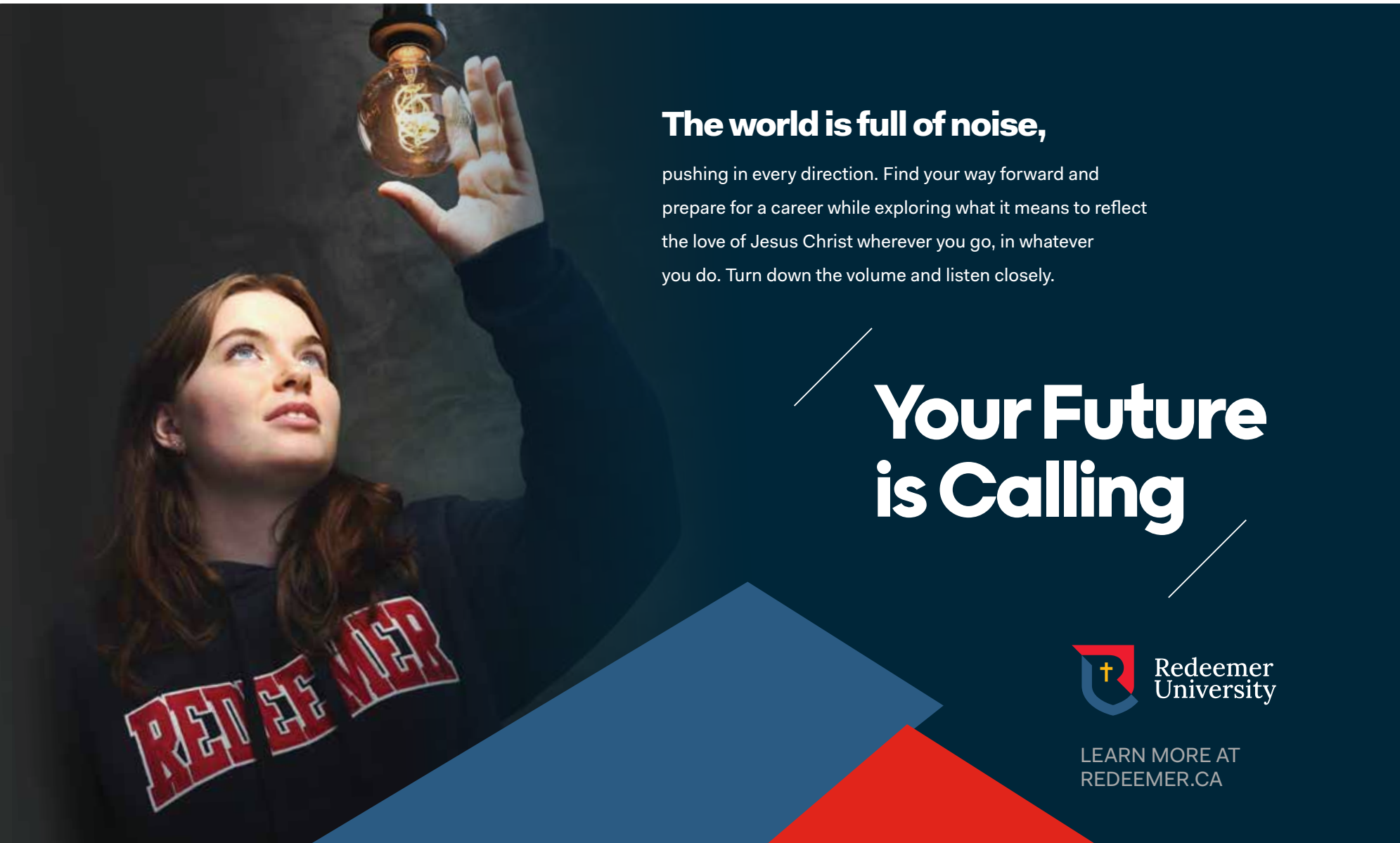
And Greidanus hopes his life can be an encouragement to other young people coming out as gay in Christian spaces.

“If I can make a difference in anybody’s life, especially younger people’s lives, knowing that ‘this is what it was like, but this is what you can become,’ then that’s amazing.”



Marlene Bergsma

Marlene lives in the Niagara Region where she hikes, camps, paddles, cycles, and runs.



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AVE, MARÍA

“Ave, ave,” soar the stereo boy-voices
as I hang the blue-robed *Virgen*
and her naked *Niño*
from the top of the tree.
A cubit below the fatherless Holy Family, I tether
their tin *burro* to a branch.
The mother and child are all of a piece,
a single piece of cutout hammered metal
wrought by the peasant hands
and fingers of the Oaxaca women’s cooperative,
where seven summers ago we bought this
ornament
and fifty others, mostly birds.

I hang them
according to a sacred Advent hierarchy of glory
of my own devising:
Just as star differs from star in glory,
so does bird from bird.
First, those *aves* of transcendent beauty:
quetzals, hummingbirds, trogons,
with real-life names like “Elegant,” “Resplendent,”
“Magnificent.”

Lower down, I hang the swallows, and
I remember that the Spanish word, *golondrina*,
also means “prostitute,” and that *El Niño*
became the friend of prostitutes and sinners.
I recall also the legend of the swallows
who appeared to José in a dream, crying

“Ay, ay, take your family and
fly, fly, for Herod is seeking to kill
all the *niños* of the *pueblo*,”
and I wonder for a moment
if I should give the swallows a more exalted place.
No, for all their noble associations
they remain outwardly unremarkable,
although their dancing flight must please the Holy
Child.

“I know all the *aves* of the air,” says the Lord
somewhere in the Psalms,
and later on bids us reflect
upon their carefree unawareness
of their beak to crop existence.
No worries, as even the most endangered
receive their food from God

and make their every flight an ascension
in miniature,
a presumption of resurrection,
a union of earth and heaven.
Indeed, the Creator has made them
a little lower than the angels,
you might say,
which is why I’ve set the most glorious
just below a ring of six tin angels
who serenade the holy Mother and Child
with trumpet blasts
and cries of “ave, ave, ave.” 🦋



"Heron: A Time for Slow" (36 x 36, acrylic, inks, charcoal, papers) by Karen Tamminga-Paton of Crowsnest Pass, Alberta (used with permission).



H. D. Sandy Ayer

H.D. Sandy Ayer is director of library services emeritus at Ambrose University and lives in Calgary, AB. Sandy has served as a library consultant in Africa, Asia and Europe.

THE SACRED ACT OF CREATING



Malik Dieleman | Columnist

Malik, CC's new Photo Editor, is a Toronto-based photographer and multidisciplinary artist whose work explores themes of belonging, identity and faith.

ENGAGING IN the arts can be a deeply spiritual act – an expression of worship, reflection and even healing. Through creating, we can enter a space where faith and imagination meet, where the Spirit speaks not only through words but also through images.

This fall, I joined a Christian art therapy group hosted virtually by Genesis Art Therapy and Blue Flame Art Therapy. Each session begins quietly. We slow our breathing, get into an open posture, and pray. A candle is lit as a physical reminder of God’s presence. After a brief check-in with one another, we move into a visio divina exercise, a practice of sacred seeing.

A passage of scripture is read aloud three times, each reading followed by silence for reflection. We invite the Spirit to bring to mind images, colours, or feelings. These become the starting point for a time of visual response.

For the next 40 minutes or so, we create. Some participants paint or draw; others collage, sculpt, write or photograph. The timeframe can feel daunting, but our facilitators remind us that the goal isn’t to produce a polished piece but to be present in the process of reflective

art-making. Creating becomes a way of processing what God is stirring up within us. In this space, no one critiques or evaluates another’s work. Instead, we listen, observe, and reflect.

I’m often surprised how quickly an image comes to mind. Sometimes a scene forms clearly in my mind, and I translate it through photography. Other times, I explore abstract shapes and colours, guided more by a feeling. Once, a specific memory resurfaced, and I explored it through collage. This process reminds me that inspiration is most alive when we are in Spirit.

After our time of creating, we gather to share our pieces and reflections, guided by questions from the facilitators. We listen to one another, noticing the ways God has met us through our art.

The intersection of faith and art can feel narrowly defined to worship music, biblical scenes, or explicitly “Christian” imagery, but God’s creativity is far broad-



"Here, Beyond" by Malik Dieleman from his art show "Already, Not Yet," on display in Toronto until Jan. 31, 2026.

er. As an artist, I find it freeing to explore faith through my work without being confined to those categories. My current photography exhibit in Toronto, “Already, Not Yet”, reflects themes of faith without overt religious symbols.

Through this practice of faith-focused art-making, I’ve come to see how the sacred can

be found in the simplest acts of creating. A brushstroke, a torn piece of paper, the click of a camera can all be prayers in motion. To create is to participate in God’s own creativity, joining in the quiet work of renewal and beauty. May we continue to leave room for this mystery, and for the Spirit to inspire. 🦋

BLUE JAY JOY



Michael DeMoor | Michael.DeMoor@kingsu.ca

Michael teaches politics in the Politics, History and Economics program at The King's University in Edmonton and in his spare time tries to focus on much smaller things like wood warblers and hockey stats.

I'M NOT normally a "baseball guy." I have the bandwidth for basically one sports fandom and one team and that's reserved for my beloved Edmonton Oilers. But, like millions of other Canadians, I got on the Blue Jays bandwagon this fall. It took until halfway through the Yankees series for me to get interested, then halfway through the Mariner's series to get excited, and I was "there" (so to speak) for the start of the World Series. Go ahead and despise me for being a bandwagon fan if you've been a long-suffering devotee for years; I can only say that, as an Oiler's fan, I know all about suffering.

If I'm not really all that "into" baseball, why did I get on that bandwagon? The simple answer is that I realized I was starved for

collective joy and I didn't want to miss out on the opportunity to share in it. I spend a lot of time paying attention to the "public life" of my city, my province, my country (and of the country down south that is partly "mine"), and my extended church family. The public realm is always a realm of contestation, argument, bargaining and compromise. In many ways, that's a sign of health in a pluralistic democracy: we're not all the same and we don't all have the same values or interests and working those differences out is hard – and often frustrating – work.

But for at least the past year (guess why... I'm writing this column on Nov 4), our public life has been, frankly, brutal and deeply dispiriting. Even in my own neighbourhood and city the



Græne Mackay, Cagle Cartoons & Hamilton Spectator

recent municipal election campaigns were marked by a degree of resentment and anger that I hadn't felt before. I helped organize a candidate's forum for my area. I was deeply shaken by the applause generated by some candidates for utterly unfeeling characterizations of their poor

and unhoused neighbours. The appetite for dehumanization and scapegoating was palpable amongst my fellow middle-class homeowners gathered to hear out our prospective representatives.

SHARED JOY (AND SORROW)

In this context, seeing what

seemed like my whole country erupt in uncomplicated shared joy was irresistible; I felt I had to share in it. If it's a sign of health that we disagree with our neighbours, that we are different from them, and that we contest our differences, we also suffer when we are fundamentally divided from them emotionally. Our public sphere is not devoid of laughter, but so often it's the mirthless laughter of contempt, derision or triumph. This kind of joy comes at the expense of others – my joy in thwarting you is constituted by your loss or humiliation. What the Jays offered was a joy we could feel together with people with whom we had little else in common or even with whom we felt little "public" sympathy. Sports can do that. They are not as uncomplicated as they seem on the surface (there is much that's wrong with pro sports), but for a moment it's a non-zero-sum shared joy. That was balm for my weary soul.

Too bad that shared sports-joy comes with shared sports-sorrow. Ah well. Worth it. [↗](#)

NOT MY OWN



Heidi VanderSlikke | hmvanderslikke@gmail.com

Heidi lives in Mapleton Township, Ont. Her life and writing centre on faith, family and farm life.

JACK AND I are planning an early winter vacation. Lord willing, we'll trade some of the short, dark days of December for tropical breezes and warm sunshine. Mmm... we'll linger over morning coffee in the dappled shade of a palm tree, wiggle our toes in the powdery sand and float blissfully on the turquoise waters of the Caribbean. We'll have time for reading books, taking walks and engaging in idle chit-chat with islanders and fellow tourists. The most difficult decision of each day will be choosing a restaurant for supper.

However, our precious ten days are bookended by two days of wearisome travel. Lovely as it is, we won't forget that Barbados is not our home. We're visitors. We don't belong there for more than a short time.

We belong on a 150-acre patch of land in rural Ontario. That's where the people we love most in the world are all within driving distance, where we're surrounded by the familiar and comfortable, and where we live the life God has blessed us with. Truth be told, even this place is only temporary. Our passports say Canadian, but our real citizenship belongs elsewhere.

I remember our first holiday together. The day after our wedding we loitered by the breakfast buffet. A wave of security washed over me all at once. This newly-minted husband had promised to stay with me until death separates us! That's serious commitment. There was (and still is) great joy in knowing Jack will be at my side as long as we both have breath.



While planning a winter vacation to Barbados, Heidi reflects on the theme of Belonging: "Our passports say Canadian, but our real citizenship belongs elsewhere."

It foreshadowed the confidence I felt the first time I read the opening Q&A of the Heidelberg Catechism. What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

The idea of belonging to someone else, like "property," might chafe an individualist's nerves. And yet there is a strong drive within us to belong, to be part of something bigger than ourselves – family, church, community, sports team, fan club, Costco. The possibilities are endless.

Not much wiggle room in the

Heidelberg, though. Christ himself is our only source of strength, hope, consolation. We belong to him body and soul (that's all we've got), in life and death (that's all there is). God's claim on us is complete and eternal. Even death won't shut it down. That inspires one of two reactions. Will you balk or believe?

For believers, that Holy Night some 2000 years ago marks the first advent of our Redeemer – the One who calls us out of darkness and into the blazing light of grace. While that divinely human bundle was placed in a manger, the Judean hills flamed with angelic messen-

gers. To believe their good news is to join the throng of beneficiaries. Membership has its privileges. Look up Psalm 103.

In God's wisdom there's a marvelous and mysterious choreography between believing and belonging. This we know for certain – one doesn't come without the other. This Christmas may you find deep joy in belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ. As we believe in and wait for his return, take comfort that you are not alone. And find your confidence in this extraordinary thought – you are not your own! [↗](#)

WHERE THE LIGHT SHINES



Rhianna McGregor Hajzer | Guest Columnist

Rhianna is a Christian by grace, blind by design and a writer by passion. She writes from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

CHRISTMAS MAY not look the same for me now that I'm blind, but it means even more than it used to. My memories of the season are blurred around the edges – the powder-white world is a little more grey, the sparkle of stars a little less bright – and while the lights of the Christmas tree still shine, they dim a little more with each passing year. But although I cannot see the lights, I've found the same joy shining in other ways.

It's a joy that comes alive in the scent of cinnamon-topped sugar cookies, the squeak of freshly fallen snow underfoot, and the sound of a church filled with voices singing "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve. It's a joy that rises above the holiday bustle and settles into the quiet spaces where the steady presence of Emmanuel shines through the darkness, inviting us into the quiet wonder of God with us.

Christmas feels most alive here

– not in the clamour and noise of the season's festivities but in the stillness which reveals how the world Christ entered as a babe isn't so different from my own: one marked by darkness but aglow with hope.

IN THE MIDST OF SHADOWS

God's people needed hope that first Christmas. I imagine the darkness casting shadows over their lives – 400 years of silence from the Lord and the long-ago promise of a coming Messiah presumed forgotten amid the weight of Roman rule. Yet even in that darkness, God promised light: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone" (Isa. 9:2). In the very beginning, God separated light from darkness, called it day, and declared it good (Gen. 1:4). And thousands of years lat-



Leanne VanderMeer

Christmas is an invitation to let the light of Christ shine into the hidden corners of our lives.

er, his plan of redemption drew one step closer. But this time, he did not keep the light apart from the darkness – he entered it himself, sending his Light into the midst of the shadows, where he began his work of transformation from the inside out. It's a work that continues to this day in the hearts of those who believe in him.

We anticipate the Christmas season as one of celebration and joy, but for many, the season brings deep sorrows we'd sooner keep hidden. For me, this Christ-

mas marks the first without my grandpa, and though I'm comforted to know he is spending it with the Lord he loved so well, his absence leaves a hollow place in my heart. Yet the light of Christ shines brighter than my grief.

Even without sight, I feel it in small, tangible ways: a tightened hand in mine on a winter's walk, the reverent beauty of placing the baby Jesus in the Nativity manger, or friendships deepened over a shared mug of cocoa. God's presence is not confined to what we see.

Psalm 27:1 declares, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" and in this truth, fear and despair begin to fade. For those of us who walk through seasons of shadow, the promise remains: Emmanuel, God with us, is here.

Christmas is more than a festive display. It is an invitation to step into the quiet wonder of God's love, to let his light shine into the hidden corners of our lives, and to know that even when our eyes cannot see, his joy, peace and hope are never beyond our reach. [✚](#)

A STORY WORTH RETELLING



Sara Pot | thepotfamily@gmail.com

The Pot family story includes a life of caregiving for daughters Rachel and Janneke.

CHRISTMAS IS a time of year when familiar stories are shared. These are tales we've memorized, recited and passed along. When my children were young, we kept a special box of Christmas books. Stories included W. G. Van de Hulst's *The Search for Christmas* and *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

Perhaps there's a familiar story in your own Christmas traditions. In popular American culture, many recognize the opening line, "'Twas the night before Christmas," from Clement Clarke Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas". Classic literature fans might recall one of my favourites, O. Henry's *The Gift of*

the Magi, which begins, "One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all." And the words from Luke 2, best read by Linus from *Charlie Brown*: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."

THE STORY IN OUR CELLS

Last month, I took an online course on genomics and patient advocacy. The first week, we learned how our body's story is inscribed and retold in the language of our cells. Here's the short science lesson: The human genome is made up of over three billion chemical building blocks, known together as DNA

(deoxyribonucleic acid). Nearly all of these blocks are identical from person to person. The remaining tiny bit of differences make each of us unique.

To study the genome, scientists must first "sequence" it by determining the exact order of the billions of DNA letters. This process is called whole genome sequencing (WGS). Almost every cell in our body contains a complete copy of our entire sequenced genome, like a story that is told over and over.

MEANINGFUL MOSAIC

During the course, several thoughts stood out to me. First, there is intentional design in who we are and beauty in these patterns. I say this carefully, knowing that some genetic conditions carry painful and complex stories; living with a rare or fatal disease cannot be easily explained.

Second, learning about the

reference genome – a DNA sequence that represents a "typical" human genome – reminded me of the limits of what we've called "normal." Since the first genome was sequenced in 2001, there is a growing understanding of the need for more data and more diverse representation. Much of what we've measured so far has been based on samples from people of European ancestry.

TELL THE WHOLE STORY

If our current reference doesn't fully represent all people, then some genetic differences may be just that – differences, not defects. Has this limited understanding of the human genome story created a deficit-based lens through which we view differences as children develop? I also wonder about racial bias and equity in care. If we better understand and tell the story held within our own cells, perhaps there will be more un-



Rawpixel

What stories are you reading?

derstanding and acceptance in health care – for all.

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy [a story worth retelling!], which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10). [✚](#)

GOD'S LONG NOSE



Bob Bruinsma | bruinsmabob@gmail.com

Bob lives in Edmonton and admits that his nose is not nearly as long as it ought to be.

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Ps.103:8).

IMAGINE THAT your nose was as long as your arm. You would have to move slowly and carefully so as not to bump into people with your nose. You’d be saying, “Oh, sorry I bumped into you with my nose.” Or, conversely, as people ran into your nose, you might get annoyed and say things like, “Hey! Will you please watch where you’re going? You just bent my nose!” You can see that if your nose was as long as your arm, you would have to control your temper. You would have to be slow

to anger, or you’d have unpleasant encounters with people all the time all on account of all the trouble it would cause. If you weren’t careful and hit someone with your nose, that person might retaliate by tying your nose into a knot or giving it a violent tug. So, if you had any say in the matter, you would probably choose not to have a long nose. You’d be pleased with an ordinary three- or four-centimeter proboscis.

The Bible tells us that God has a long nose. It says so in Exodus 34:6 and also in Psalm 103: 8 quoted above. In English, these texts state that God is “slow to anger.” Slow to an-



I'm about to take a vow of silence, Frank. Guess I'll be relying on emojis for a while.

Katie Hoogendam

ger is the English translation of Hebrew which, if translated literally, is actually “long of

nose.” Thus the verse could be translated: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, long of

nose and abounding in steadfast love.” Long of nose is a Hebrew idiom meaning that God is patient, does not get angry easily, and does not stay angry very long.

OUR TURN TO SHINE

Think of how quickly we often respond to some small annoyance with a nasty retort. Think of all the anger in the world between people of different nationalities, skin colours, income levels, religions and so many other differences. Listen as politicians vent their anger at their political opponents and as people belittle each other on social media platforms. The world is becoming a meaner and angrier place. As God’s children – both young and old – we should all be examples of mercy, grace, patience and steadfast love. We should all be slow to anger as well. Like our loving God, we should all become long of nose. 🙏

GRIZZLY DATA DEBATES



Curt Gesch | cgesch63@gmail.com

Curt is supposed to write about agriculture and the environment. He lives on a farm near Quick, B.C.

B.C. HAS BANNED grizzly hunting, and, as is all too common, this has led to confrontational thinking. Hunters say, “There’s plenty grizzlies; it’s all a PETA ploy.” The cabinet minister in charge says, “There are not enough grizzlies to continue a hunt with our current information.”

My view is something like this: People who hunt so they can get bragging rights – “I got me a grizzer” – are narcissistic. I know of one person who shot three grizzlies: two of them had become cattle-killers and were dangerous to people. I think that letting a hunter shoot one of these is better than having wardens do it. In either case, the bear dies. Relocation only works when the bear can be caught and a suitable place found – empty of other grizzlies and with a huge area of suitable habitat.

I think that those who say, “We don’t have enough information” about B.C. grizzly populations are

right. But why not involve the public – hunters, farmers and hikers – in collecting data? For example, the grizzly that wanders through our property has probably been doing that for years. I consulted a biologist, who said the grizzly would use the same route every year; that he was about 10 years old and in prime condition. And we didn’t know of his existence until I put up a trail camera.

ELK SIGHTINGS

When there was a huge kerfuffle about too many elk and not enough information about the actual elk population, a farmer friend of mine and I decided to do something. Hunters and farmers got together to draft a letter to the biologist in charge, offering to conduct a survey of elk population in the area that would be based on visual sightings on one day throughout the region. This would – with possible overlap



The grizzly on Curt's trail cam (left) and a child's hand in its print (above).

in the sightings – provide information to help biologists decide whether there should be a hunting season or not. It turned out that there were more elk than a helicopter survey counted.

Meanwhile, on the agricultural front, some money flowed in for farmers and ranchers to make eight-foot “elk fences” around their piles of stored hay and silage. A limited entry hunting season was set up with permits chosen from applications, and – this is the key point – all of it was for private land and required personal contact and permission from the landowner. There was no season on crown land, but Indigenous peoples were free to hunt on crown land that was in

their traditional territory. A few years later a general open season for large bull elk was opened in the region.

THE GRIZZLY QUESTION

What about grizzlies? Are they as rare as it seems? Do we have enough information to know?

I can tell you that one grizzly travels regularly through our farm. A sow with three cubs on a nearby farm about 10 km away was spotted eating barley. And as many as five bears about three km away were grazing with cows on my friend Paul’s property. These are almost certainly all different animals. If the cabinet minister asked us, he’d get one more source for population estimates!

What happens instead is that wardens are called when there is danger to the general population, or when grizzlies attack livestock. After one grizzly had reportedly taken down more than 30 head of cattle, two wardens killed the animal now on display in the Smithers airport. Nicknamed the Phantom Grizzly, he weighed 1,012 pounds, very large for this area. He would have wandered hundreds of kilometres in his lifetime.

Just this spring we had another grizzly pose for a trail camera photo (see photo). He was on our farm; he follows a trail that is protected from development by a conservation covenant. May he live long and keep his nose clean, out of trouble. 🙏

WE BELONG TO A MYSTERY



Rudy Eikelboom | roelof.eikelboom@ret.wlu.ca

Rudy, who sees the 80-year existence of CC as a minor blessed mystery, is retired from the council at Waterloo Christian Reformed Church and from teaching psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University.

THIS MONTH, we celebrate the Incarnation, a fancy word we use to remember a baby born in a stable, in an occupied country, in poverty. Yet this event is full of mystery.

The creeds tell us this baby was fully God and fully man in one person. Yet from what we have learned about God's creation and the gift of life, this birth is inexplicable. Normally, a baby receives half its DNA from the father and half from the mother, and the genetic material received from the father determines the child's sex. If the DNA includes a Y chromosome, the child will be a boy; if it has an X chromosome, the child will be a girl.

In Jesus' case, we are left with

a conundrum. As fully man, his genetic material is the same as ours, but there is no source of genetic material to supplement Mary's. Yet if only Mary's DNA was involved, Jesus would, of necessity, have been a girl. Where did Jesus' Y chromosome come from?

Another mystery lies in the fact that babies are born helpless. Without parents or another caregiver, a baby will die. But how could Jesus – fully God and, as John says, responsible for all creation – be dependent? Any reliance on Mary and Joseph seems strange. Children need to learn their parents' language and come to appreciate how the world works, and the Gospels tell

us Jesus learned things he did not know. But how is that possible if he is also the Word?

BECAUSE OF GOD'S LOVE

Given how limited we are as adults, this mystery is no more explainable if we say that the Godhead entered Jesus in some mysterious manner at his baptism. The difference between the creator and any human, no matter how old, exceeds our understanding. We have no way to explain how our all-powerful God could also be a dependent human man.

As followers of Christ, we either deny the reality of these mysteries – Jesus was just a very wise human – or we accept that our faith rests on matters we don't understand. If we live into the mystery of the Incarnation, then it changes the foundation of our belonging. It is not by understanding some set of beliefs that we are saved; we cannot understand miracles like the birth of the Son of God. But we accept that



"Psalm 15" (2023) by Audrey Boy. Inspired by David's question, "LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent?" this painting illustrates an intimate meeting between God's spirit and humanity as represented by Mary's annunciation.

we belong by trust. The more we learn about our world, the more mysterious God's actions become. Our scientific knowledge changes many things we thought we knew about our faith, but if we acknowledge that, at its heart, this faith is a mystery we accept, then these challenges should not

worry us.

We are grafted by the work of the Spirit onto the true vine of God (another mystery), not by what we know but because of God's gracious love for the creation and for us – a mystery all wrapped up in a God/child born in a stable. [➤](#)

IS BELONGING A CRIME?



Matthijs Kronemeijer | mkronemeijer+cc@gmail.com

Matthijs lives in Toronto with his wife Brenda and daughter Lydia. Although he identifies as a Roman Catholic, he mostly attends Willowdale Christian Reformed Church.

IN NOVEMBER 2024 I was involved in a public event at Toronto's Church of the Redeemer, a historic Anglican church with beautiful stained glass and some monuments related to the First World War. Our event was called "Voices for Peace." The organizing team represented five different organizations and networks: the Henri Nouwen Society, the International Thomas Merton Society, Citizens for Public Justice, the Canadian Council of Churches, and Catholics for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land (CJPHL). At that time I worked a few hours per week for CJPHL and had pushed for the group to be involved.

It wasn't easy to talk about peace in November 2024, and it hasn't become any easier, but we pulled it off. "Voices for Peace"

was planned as an event to engage the whole person: through reflection, an art installation ("PeaceTalks" by Karen Tamminga-Paton, also featured in CC June 2024), music, conversation and prayer. Our speaker was Adrian Jacobs, an Indigenous elder who among other things dwelt at length on his experiences in Palestine. I might have written for *Christian Courier* about what we were doing, but as a co-organizer and a migrant I wasn't sure yet how to approach it. The video recording, however, is still on YouTube – I recommend it.

CC's theme this Advent issue is "belonging," and to understand how complex that is, listening to Indigenous people is an excellent place to start. At "Voices for Peace," Adrian Jacobs brought to life the contrast

between a settler subdivision on the West Bank in Palestine and the precarious life of an indigenous Bedouin population who are made to live on garbage dumps and breathe the toxic fumes of highways and chemical plants. Jacobs and his Indigenous delegation recognized what was going on. "They're doing to you what they did to us in Canada." By the laws of settler colonialism, belonging is a crime, punishable by death.

THE MORAL RIGHT OF MIGRANTS

Being a migrant is complex too, however. I live a life of privilege, but with real ambiguities and uncertainties. What long-term home is Canada offering me and my family? Many of our fellow churchgoers certainly "belong" in spacious Canadian homes in boring neighbourhoods with nary a bike lane in sight, but I'm not sure I ever will.

I know, however, that belonging is also about being allowed to make a contribution. Working for CJPHL, a group of aged grassroots activists, was effectively my first job in Canada.



Unfortunately it was almost all online, which made things difficult, and some of our initiatives may not exactly have helped my future work prospects. But it was a start.

It is not strange or wrong to want to live somewhere else; migrants deserve a chance to belong. Pope John XXIII wrote in 1963 about the moral right of migrants to seek a better place to live, not only for reasons of war and persecution but also for economic reasons such as the need to provide for their children (*Pacem in Terris*, # 106). Unfortunately, the Europeans who settled oth-

er continents not only brought their ambitions, technology and organizing skills, but also levels of trauma and self-delusion they themselves were hardly aware of. Their religions became ideological instruments of oppression that punished and prevented belonging in place.

By true Christian standards, belonging is no crime – but giving up on a place probably is. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse," says Isaiah 11. Even without the "abiding city" Isaiah describes, we can still learn and re-learn to belong, and receive it as a blessing. [➤](#)

A GUITAR JOURNEY THROUGH THE PSALMS



David T. Koyzis | dtkoyzis@gmail.com

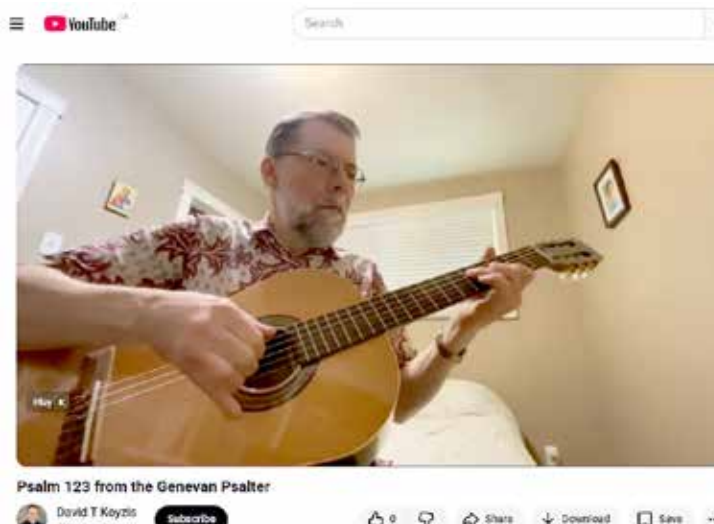
*David is an affiliated scholar with Global Scholars Canada. He is author most recently of *Citizenship Without Illusions* (InterVarsity Press, 2024).*

FOUR YEARS ago I completed a project begun when I was 30 years old: setting the biblical Psalms to verse in contemporary English to the proper melodies of the Genevan Psalter. Four grants from the Stanford Reid Trust and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship enabled me to hire someone to format the texts to the 1945 arrangements of Dutch organists Jacques P. Bekkers and Jacob Kort. I am currently seeking a publisher for this collection.

As an amateur musician myself, after discovering these tunes, I quickly worked up several for the guitar. Indeed these 16th-century melodies are well suited to this treatment, giving them a flavour similar to renaissance

pieces for the lute. Unfortunately, many 19th- and early 20th-century arrangements of the Genevan melodies suppressed this flavour, making them sound overly sentimental and removing the syncopated rhythms of the originals. Congregations in turn slowed them down to a snail's pace and may inadvertently have doomed their continued use in succeeding generations.

Just over a year ago, I began to post guitar performances of the Genevan melodies on my YouTube channel, @Byzantine-Calvinist. A very few I had already posted more than a decade ago, so I decided to add as many more as I could manage to play with my limited guitar skills.



Listen to David play @ByzantineCalvinist on YouTube.

ANCHORED IN OUR HEARTS

For most of 2022 and 2023 I had been unable to play guitar at all due to a painful attack of frozen shoulders following a freak illness contracted during a visit to Michigan. This condition made holding a guitar virtually impossible, and

I had begun to doubt that I would ever play again.

But when the last of the symptoms disappeared at the beginning of 2024, I was delighted to recognize that I could once again painlessly hold a guitar in the proper position. However, by that time I

had become quite rusty in my abilities. So I persevered and kept at it over the next months, and by November I was ready to add more performances to my channel.

Naturally, I recorded the ones I knew best and proceeded from there. To be honest, I doubted that I would be able to master all of the tunes, some of which are in tricky rhythms and require rather uncomfortable fingering positions in the left hand. Yet by the 30th of September, I had successfully recorded all 124 of the Genevan tunes, plus a few extra, and posted them at my YouTube channel under "The Genevan Psalter" playlist.

Although virtually all Protestants sang the Psalms in their liturgies from the Reformation onwards, over the centuries psalm-singing has declined. I hope that my efforts might help to reverse this trend and to anchor this biblical collection in our hearts and in our liturgies once again. 

A SHEPHERD WHO SHOVELS SNOW



Darren Roorda | roordadarren@gmail.com

Darren is President of Shepherd Consulting focusing on creating healthy organizational leadership, especially in not-for-profit and Christian communities (schools, churches and charities).



istockfrancisid.M Canada

THE WORD "belong" originally meant "to go along with, pertain to or be the rightful property of." It conveys connection, place and rightful relationship – a sense of being linked to something or someone. Belonging is relational; it's about care, trust and responsibility.

When Christ came to earth, the Gospel of John expresses this beautifully: "He tabernacled

among us" – literally, "He pitched a tent among us." Jesus' arrival at Christmas echoes the Old Testament tent of meeting, where God dwelt among his people. His presence among us is relational. It reminds us that Christ belongs to us and we belong to him. We are intimately linked, entrusted to one another's care. It is theology that feels like a hug: safe and warm.

TRUST AND SERVICE

Belonging naturally fosters trust. When two people are connected – whether through a handshake, a shared celebration or mutual care – they demonstrate that each has the other's well-being in mind. In the same way, when we belong to Christ and to one another, trust grows organically. We mysteriously belong to one another: my hurt inspires your grace; your weakness invites my service; your need becomes my duty. This mutual belonging cultivates a community rooted in care.

Perhaps that is why, at Christmas, we are drawn to serve our neighbours – in soup kitchens, hospitals or by shovelling snowy driveways. Our actions flow from a sense of belonging that began in Bethlehem.

Belonging also builds moral credibility and social trust, the very foundation of Christian witness. Historical examples abound: during the plagues of the second and third centuries, Christians stayed behind while most fled. They nursed the sick, buried the dead and cared for orphans and widows. Their sense of belonging prompted service; service generated witness; and witness grew the church. Belonging initiates care. Care

builds credibility. Credibility strengthens community.

SELFISH LEADERS

Contrast this with today's leadership culture, where self-interest often eclipses communal care. Headlines reveal leaders whose focus on personal gain has undermined trust: Ravi Zacharias, Bruxy Cavey, and James MacDonald (financial mismanagement and misconduct). Each case illustrates the consequences when leaders forget they belong and are accountable through and to a wider community. Selfish leadership erodes witness and isolates the church from its neighbours.

This connection between belonging and accountability is precisely why the American Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) updated its leadership standards for Christian organizations. A leader is accountable to those to whom they belong – the people, communities and congregations entrusted to their care. Accountability flows from belonging. Leaders are called to prioritize the good of the community over personal interests, demonstrating through governance, transparency and action that the church can be trusted. The principle is clear: Christian

leadership is rooted in belonging – to Christ, to the community and to one another – and from that belonging flows accountability.

JESUS' EXAMPLE

It is therefore surprising that some, like Franklin Graham's ministries (known for running Operation Christmas Child), publicly resist such standards. Yet this principle is modelled perfectly in Jesus' own life. From infancy onward, he built public trust by serving the least and lost, demonstrating credibility through action. Any organizational posture – standards, leadership evaluations, healthy governing boards – that fosters a sense of "we belong" strengthens both community and witness.

This Christmas, especially for leaders in a Christian context, embrace Christ's belonging. Model it in your actions. Serve your community. Prioritize their well-being. Accept accountability to those you belong to. When leaders act from a true sense of belonging, their behaviour amplifies Christ's witness, builds trust and cultivates flourishing communities. Belonging is the lifeblood of Christian care and community. 

CALLED TO SERVE

Meet Peter Timmerman, the new executive director of World Renew Canada. | [Naomi Bula, Communications Director, World Renew](#)

Sponsored Content: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the organization and do not necessarily represent the editorial perspective of Christian Courier.

PETER TIMMERMAN'S journey into international development began with a heart for service and a deep sense of calling. Now stepping into a leadership role at World Renew Canada, Peter reflects on the hope that continues to fuel his work.

Bula: Peter, can you tell us a little about your journey and how it led you to World Renew?

Timmerman: I've known about the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee – now World Renew – for as long as I can remember. It's always been close to my heart. My first real step into the sector was as an intern in Tanzania back in 1994. That experience helped me to find and define my vocation. Since then, I've worked with several non-government organizations across sub-Saharan Africa, Canada and Latin America. I thought I'd spend my whole life in Africa, but God had other plans. Some of those plans were difficult and unexpected, but they

led me back to Canada, and ultimately, back to World Renew.

Bula: What did you learn during your time in Tanzania?

Timmerman: I often say that internship was my “Master's and PhD” in international development. I did later earn a Master of Science in Rural Planning from the University of Guelph, but Tanzania taught me things no classroom ever could. I learned that people are not defined by poverty and how complex its causes and solutions are. I also discovered that I was good at the work, which matters! You need more than passion and good intentions to succeed. You need to be aware of your own skills and limitations and how they connect to the opportunities God might have in store.

Bula: What drives your passion for this work?

Timmerman: I love facilitating change,



More than 30 years after Peter's internship in Tanzania, World Renew is still at work there. In this Maternal and Child Health project, mothers are trained in nutrition and offered support with breastfeeding.

whether in systems, structures or people. You can't legislate transformation; it has to be cultivated. Seeing communities come together, experiencing those “aha” moments and watching real change happen: that's the heart of World Renew. I believe that every square centimetre of this world already belongs to God. Our role is to learn about and work with people, not to start from scratch. We're not the heroes; we're partners in what God is already doing.

Bula: What does it mean to serve God at World Renew?

Timmerman: At World Renew, we recognize that we are all made in the image of God, and it is our sinful and unjust world that has twisted that. Our calling is not just to “help” but to address the systemic injustices that cause that inequality. We take our lead from Christ, who came as a servant for all and expressed that those with power and privilege have a special measure of responsibility to the poor and oppressed.

Bula: What are some of the biggest challenges facing the sector today?

Timmerman: There are many. Conflict is worsening, and global polarization is causing countries to look inward. That's happening at a time when we need to be looking outward more than ever. Funding is also declining – major donors are pulling back, including the Canadian government. These trends make our work more urgent and more difficult. But they also call us to be more innovative and better at what we do.

Bula: What keeps you motivated when the work gets tough?

Timmerman: The people I've met over the years keep me going. Not everyone gets to travel and see the impact firsthand, so I think it's important to share those stories and remind our team that the work truly matters. I've seen lives changed. I've seen communities transformed.



Peter Timmerman

Bula: What excites you about being part of World Renew Canada?

Timmerman: It feels like coming home. I've worked with World Renew before, and I believe Canada has a unique opportunity to make a global impact – especially now, when many are turning inward. The Christian Reformed Church's history with refugee resettlement is also something I'm proud to be connected to. I think Canada is a place where we can make a real difference in the world.

Bula: What's your favourite item from the World Renew Gift Catalogue?

Timmerman: I love the smaller animals, especially chickens! I've seen chicken programs work really well. They're easy to manage, propagate quickly, and the required infrastructure costs are low. They're practical and they make an impact.

Bula: What's your hope for the future of this work?

Timmerman: That we continue to be faithful. That we keep showing up. That we keep asking hard questions, that we listen well, and that we are willing to innovate and adapt. We must remain rooted in our faith and open to God's leading. The challenges are real, but so is the hope. And I believe that hope is what we're called to renew.

Hope starts with a gift.

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JOHN 1:5 (ESV)

This Christmas, we remember the Light that entered our world—Jesus Christ, our hope in life and death. May his peace fill your hearts this season and in the year ahead.








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OBITUARIES

VAN KAMPEN, Anthonie (Tony)

On Tuesday, October 7th 2025, the Lord, in his wisdom and loving care, took home to be with him our dear Dad, Opa and Great-Opa at the age of 95.

He was a devoted loving husband of Janny (Jane), for 57 years, until her passing in 2016.

Lovingly remembered by his daughters and their spouses: Marjorie (Chris Perry), Nancy (George Horlings), Sharon van Kampen (Evert Nagel) and Jennifer van Kampen (Theo Katerberg)

Beloved father of Ken who went to be with the Lord in 1985.

Dear Opa to: Matthew (Clare), Andrew and Daniel (Casey);

Jason, Meghan (Jakob), Evan, and Joshua (Amanda);

Anthonie (Julia), Kenneth, Gerrit and Shaun;

Jordan (Elly), Malcolm and Jayna

And Great-Opa to: Liam & Georgia Kort and Erik Horlings

Tony was born on July 5th, 1930 in Axel, Zeeland, the Netherlands. He was the 4th child of Cornelis and Maatje. He was lovingly called Anton. A younger brother to Annie, Corrie and Gert; an older brother to Frans.

A quiet boy who loved to be in the outdoors, who had dreams to be a farmer. He immigrated to Canada in 1949, filled with much determination and a willingness to work hard.

As a dairy farmer, he had a deep love for the land, and a well-earned satisfaction of good cuts of hay, acres of corn and plenty of pasture. He appreciated each season for its God-directed rhythms and time.

As a father, he encouraged and challenged us to do our utmost; he delighted in our joys, and comforted us in our distress and sorrows.

As a husband to Janny, he shared a love and loyalty to each other through all the years – knowing that “the eternal God is your dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms.” They shared an immense sorrow in the loss of Ken, and an immeasurable comfort in the Lord’s strength and peace.

And, as Tony endured some health crises in his final years, his earthly body slowed down and weakened, but his faith stayed very strong. Those everlasting arms of the Lord – the loving and peaceful presence of the Lord – were his refuge, his haven, a bulwark of strength.

We have the wonderful assurance that Tony is in his eternal home, in the presence of his Lord and Saviour.

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge will give to me on that Day.” (2 Timothy 4:7-8)



DAM, Annette “Anne” Wilma (nee Vander Kruk) 1946-2025

After the decline of Frontotemporal Dementia, peacefully at Wentworth Lodge, Dundas, Ontario on Friday, September 5 at age 78. Beloved wife of René for over 57 years. Dear mother to Connie (John) Bijl, Hamilton, ON; Bill (Christine), Dundas, ON; Judy (Chris) Williams, Burlington, ON; René (Stephanie), Brant County, ON; Jennifer, Dundas, ON; Michelle (Pat) Dam, Paris, ON; Dave (Aly), Caledonia, ON; Krista (Rob) Vandekuyt, Ottawa, ON; and Steph (Luke) Spiegelhaar, Haldimand-Norfolk, ON. Cherished grandma of 22 and great-grandmother to 8. Daughter of the late Cornelis Vander Kruk and late Pauline (nee Van Leeuwen). Daughter-in-law to the late William Dam and late Maria (nee Regter). Will be missed by her brothers and sisters, her in-laws, her nieces and nephews, her extended family in The Netherlands, and by her church community. Special thank you to the staff at St. Joseph’s Villa and at the Wentworth Lodge for all of their compassionate care.

Anne’s love for her Lord was an example to many daily as she joyfully praised Him in her many years of faithful service through Idea Ministries and World Renew, her advocacy and support for The Carpentaros, her love of worship at Calvary singing in the choir and playing piano for the Friendship Club, and her passion for the importance of Biblical education in her support and years of volunteering at VBS and the local Christian schools. She served in her local community visiting families delivering VON Meals on Wheels to those in need, and she was devoted to her work for over 32 years as co-owner of William Dam Seeds. A Funeral Service was held at Calvary Christian Reformed Church, 265 Middletown Rd, Flamborough (905-628-2422) on Tuesday, September 9, 2025.

For those who wish, online condolences may be given at smithsfh.com

Brant Street Chapel



OOSTERHUIS, Dr. Alyce

May 25, 1943 - October 11, 2025

Alyce Oosterhuis (née Alberta Horzelenberg) was born on May 25, 1943, in Rotterdam, Netherlands, named after her grandfather and affectionately called “Albie” by her family. At the age of eight, she immigrated to Canada, a journey that marked the beginning of a life rooted in grace, shaped by faith, and nourished by the joy of teaching.

Alyce earned her undergraduate degree in Psychology from Calvin College in 1967, followed by two master’s degrees from Michigan State University and the University of Alberta. In 1984, she completed her doctorate in Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta, a testament to her lifelong commitment to learning and teaching.

She married Tom Oosterhuis in August 1967, and together they moved to Amsterdam. Her teaching career spanned continents, beginning with three years in Fruitland, Ontario and continuing from 1967 to 1975 at the International School of Amsterdam, where she inspired students with her insight and compassion. She taught at Kings University in the early 1980’s and joined the faculty in 1987 until her retirement in 2004.

Alyce always dreamed of being a mother. When children did not come, they joyfully adopted Matthew in 1979 and Michelle in 1982, completing their family all while Alyce pursued her academic goals.

Alyce will be remembered for the warmth she extended to all who entered her home, the grace with which she lived, and the wisdom she shared. Her legacy lives on in the lives she touched, as a teacher, a scholar, a mother, and a friend. Romans 12:9-13.

alycetom@telus.net



JOBS

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DOES CANADA REALLY NEED ANOTHER REFORMED DENOMINATION?

Summit brings together members of current and former Christian Reformed Churches. | **Marlene Bergsma**



DOES CANADA REALLY NEED ANOTHER DENOMINATION, let alone a Reformed one? Roughly 150 participants from 45 churches at the All Canada Summit, in Kitchener, Ontario, weren't sure. But by the end of the four-day gathering (November 5-8), the Summit concluded with a hopeful "yes."

As one joyful participant said, "I feel like I have been living in a smaller and smaller sandbox, but today you just showed us a vision of a beach!"

The Summit was hosted by Toward Christian Reformed Church (CRC) Canada, an organization founded in 2023 to advocate for greater independence for Canadian churches within the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA).

The Summit began with an address from Everett Vander Horst, pastor of Meadowlands CRC in Ancaster, Ontario, telling the audience that Synod 2025's overwhelming rejection of an overture proposing a separate Canadian denomination prompted organizers to consider abandoning their cause or planning a pivot.

The Summit was the pivot – an effort to pose the question to a wider group of Canadian congregations, especially since many had since disaffiliated from the CRCNA or were on the path towards disaffiliation.

"We thought we had enough resources and momentum to bring people together to wrestle with the question and imagine what could be," Vander Horst said. Certainly, joining an existing denomination is still an option, "but we believe that when we come together, we have something unique to offer – to our communities, to Canada and to God." The Reformed view of Scripture and of living out our faith is a ground-

ed and hopeful view that Canada needs, "and that the Spirit of God can continue to use to bless Canada," he added.

MADE IN CANADA

A refrain that was repeated throughout the Summit was "every square centimetre" – a metric conversion of the CRCNA's unofficial tagline of "every square inch," and meant to indicate that the entire world belongs to Jesus.

"There is no sacred versus secular," said Vander Horst. "Our work, our relationships, our art, our institutions – everything is included in God's good creation and remains under his care. The task of human beings, created in God's image, is to be gardeners and culture-makers, cultivating the world so that it flourishes under Christ's reign."

This is the kind of Christianity that Canada needs, said Shiao Chong, former editor of *The Banner*, in his keynote address near the end of the Summit. We sing "They will know we are Christians by our love," but there are T-shirts and coffee mugs with the slogan "There is no hate like Christian love," Chong said. Reformed Canadian churches now have an opportunity to reverse this narrative and be present in their communities as agents of God's love and Jesus' hope.

Chong said he was amazed by what was accomplished and hopeful for the future. "What if



President of The King's University Dr. Melanie Humphreys shared her experience of King's becoming a welcoming and diverse place, and former *Banner* Editor Shiao Chong encouraged us to be "A Christianity that Canada Needs: With not Against."



God is using all of us here to start something new for Canada?"

HOW BIG IS THIS MOVEMENT?

Angela Reitsma Bick, *Christian Courier's* editor-in-chief and co-author (with Peter Schuurman) of *Blessed are the Undone: Testimonies of the Quiet Deconstruction of Faith in Canada*, presented her analysis at a workshop entitled "The Canadian Landscape." By her estimation, up to one-quarter of Christian Reformed congregations in Canada are on a continuum between completely disaffiliated or rumoured to be considering it. That leaves three-quarters of approximately 240 congregations not interested or not talking about it.

Yet there may be members of those silent churches who are personally feeling disillusioned with American influence or denominational direction, and one of the working groups was asked to consider what ways this new community of churches might connect with like-minded individuals in churches that are staying in the CRCNA.

WORKSHOPS AND WORKING GROUPS

While about half of the Summit participants attended workshops, 40 of the Summit participants had volunteered in advance to serve on working groups. These groups met four times to discuss the foundation, structure and identity of a new Reformed denomination in Canada. Working groups were organized based on

the interests and experiences of members, and readings and questions were circulated in advance.

During the Summit, working group spokespersons shared progress reports in plenary sessions, seeking feedback and questions from the rest of the Summit participants. In total, the six working groups provided almost eight weeks' worth of person-hours in deep thought, creative brainstorming and consensus seeking. Their final reports will offer a starting point for the new denominational board and will eventually be available at towardcrccanada.net.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Participants in the Summit are now asking their congregations to consider joining this new initiative by nominating board members from their churches. This new board will potentially take over the structure – and charitable tax status – of Towards CRC Canada and become a new denomination.

What would this new denomination be called? One of the working groups was asked to answer that very question. They've done some brainstorming, but their ideas will be handed over to the new board. One thing they recommend: be Reformed, but avoid use of the name. There might be too many bad associations. ➤



Marlene Bergsma

Marlene lives in the Niagara Region, where she hikes, camps, paddles, cycles and runs.



Led by Jeremy Benjamin Zeyl, who wrote a song for the Summit called "Here I Am, Show Me The Way," times of worship were a conference highlight for many participants.

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

The All Canada Summit featured three keynote addresses, which were free and open to the public, and are available at youtube.com/@TowardCRCCanada.