Angela Reitsma Bick

World Vision Canada recently published a new book that speaks directly to Christians in the current demographic landscape of this country; it’s entitled *Shifting Stats Shaking the Church: 40 Canadian Churches Respond*, written jointly by Patricia Paddey and Karen Stiller.

To gather data, Dr. Don Moore, National Church Ambassador for World Vision Canada, and Bruxy Cavey, lead Pastor of the Meeting House, travelled to 12 Canadian cities and asked hundreds of people two questions: how has our cultural landscape changed, and how is that influencing your church?

We tend to hear negative examples in response to that second question. Moore and Cavey wanted the opposite – to find churches that are allowing the needs of those around them to shape their ministries, with positive, God-honouring results.

From forum participants and denominational leaders, they gathered the names of 200 churches that seem to be paying attention to their surrounding communities. That number was whittled down to the 40 churches featured in *Shifting Stats*.

*Christian Courier* spoke with Dr. Moore while he was on the road in Halifax, N.S.

**CC:** Can you summarize this book in one line?

**Dr. Don Moore:** Three simple words: listen, learn and lead.

Chances are you picked ... great books for summer! **PAGES 8, 19 & 20**

**Break out of the holy huddle**

A spirit of hopeful anticipation filled the room when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its final report in June. Reconciliation, the report said, is everyone’s business; this is reflected in the 94 calls for action by a wide range of actors in all aspects of Canadian life. Churches, both those that ran residential schools and those that did not, are called to play an active role as agents of reconciliation between indigenous and settler peoples in Canada.

Asking the Pope to apologize for the role of the Roman Catholic Church in residential schools drew media attention to the role of the church in the TRC’s plan for reconciliation. While higher in profile, the papal request may be easier to fulfill than some of the others, which call for change in deeply entrenched attitudes and practices. The summary report and calls to action are now being studied by Canadian churches, with the expectation that official response and follow-up action

**All nations before God’s throne:**

**The role of the church in reconciliation**

Nearly 10,000 people joined the Walk for Reconciliation in Ottawa May 31.

**Continued on page 2**

**Continued on page 2**
Break out of the holy huddle continued

may go to different parts of the world to witness what God is doing and be involved. I believe that both are critically important.

I noticed that “hands and feet,” as a phrase and as an image, kept cropping up in the book. Have churches in 2015 gotten a bit better at, to quote John Stackhouse, “connecting with the felt needs of our neighbours”? I think there’s a small but growing movement of churches that are doing that, who are realizing, we’ve got to break out of the holy huddle. We’re currently doing forums across Canada that help churches do neighbourhood mapping. It’s very easy for us to shut down and protect ourselves against everything that doesn’t seem to be right. But the churches that are really cutting it are the ones stepping out, and not in grandiose ways. They’re doing something as simple as asking each person in the church to meet two new people this week – people they haven’t talked to before. Take someone out for coffee. Get to know them. You’re not there to evangelize or tell them about your faith; you’re just there to become a friend. Through that friendship you will be surprised what will be exposed. Before long, you may have an opportunity to see a need you can minister to. If you do that, your church will certainly grow and expand. If you remain safe and protected in your community, you’ll remain static. You may have quality time, but you won’t have the moments God expects by way of reaching out and building his kingdom.

How do household debt levels, at a record 163 percent, affect our churches?

Let’s be realistic. When you spend a dollar and 63 cents for every dollar you earn, you’re eventually going to be in such debt that you’re going to have to do some kind of debt recovery program. Unfortunately, in that situation, the first thing most people quit doing is giving to charity or their local church. The crash about to come is that as we get more and more into debt, people are going to realize that something will happen to our economy, which will make tithing go down. That would affect every church ministry, every charity. Unless these organizations then learn to work together, some will stop functioning.

I’m on the East Coast now, in Halifax. Here’s a great example: several organizations realized that they each were giving food baskets at Christmas. They decided to get together, pool their resources and do it more effectively and efficiently. That’s where charities need to go in the future. We need to build relationships before then.

Speaking of food baskets, I noticed that food keeps coming up in almost all of these 40 stories.

Yes, food is important. In Canadian culture, food is a kind of currency. You get a quicker hearing, and a greater relational connect, when food is involved. It could be a Tim Hortons’ coffee, a dinner out. For years my wife and I hosted a neighbourhood BBQ, and we built more relationships that way than we ever did in the church.

What’s the biggest change you’ve seen in your lifetime within churches in Canada?

The biggest change outside the church has been the immigration shift. Virtually every community across Canada has seen an influx of immigrants, which is impacting our communities. This is why churches need to look at this very carefully. What do you do beyond welcoming them in the door? Invite them to participate in leadership. From an internal point of view I see more and more hope with the upcoming leadership in churches. They are innovating, exploring creative approaches to ministry, which speaks very well for the future of the church. I see a little bit of a drift in terms of denominational allegiance, because the structures of the past are not valued as highly as what is valued today. You see more organic relationships now, rather than formal ones. It’s all about relationships. We are beginning in a different way than we ever did in the church.

Do you think denominational distinctions still matter?

Yes, they do. I’m not saying that they’re not important, just that they have a different level of priority than they did in the past. Denominations may need to restructure to meet the needs of younger leaders. Some denominations are beginning to work together, but they still retain their uniqueness. How do we build the fabric of the church? I do not pick a church based on theology: “I love your theology, now I’m going to tolerate the people.” It’s the other way around. Do I love the people? And if I do, theology may not be as narrowly defined. I might be ready to participate in a wide range of denominations if the relationships are ones I sense are from God.

Where should we ask the Holy Spirit to move in Canadian churches today? What’s your prayer for the future?

My prayer is that leaders would become even more aware of the voice of God, and be ready to respond and obey. And that our leaders would be even more committed to listening, learning and leading, in that posture. Learn so that they are better equipped to lead.

That’s a strong emphasis on leadership. How do you define a leader?

Any influence you have on those around you – which therefore qualifies everyone. Whether it’s a mother influencing her three-year-old or a pastor leading a church of 5,000 – leadership is all about bringing influence to bear on the lives of others. So the question I would have for you and for me is, “Who does Angela and who does Don have to influence, and how are we influencing them?”

Angela Reitsoa Bick is Editor of Christian Courier.

All nations before God’s throne continued

will take place this fall. The TRC assigned a deadline of March 31, 2016 to one item (discussed on the next page), ensuring that responses or lack of responses will be noticed at that time.

The TRC’s recommendations for churches can be grouped under three themes: learn from history; respect indigenous culture, and work for justice for indigenous peoples. Most people will agree that these are essential elements on the path to reconciliation.

Learn from history

First, the report asks churches to educate every congregation and every new church leader about the history of residential schools, the church’s role and the impacts on indigenous people. This will regularly remind church members of a chapter in church history that all churches would rather forget. Similarly, all schools, including faith-based schools, are asked to update their history courses to teach Canadian history more accurately, including stories from the perspective of indigenous peoples. The materials gathered by the TRC provide rich resources for learning Canada’s history, including the darker side currently omitted from most textbooks.

Understanding what happened in the past expands our ability to understand the situation of indigenous people today, which is why the TRC report has such a strong focus on education. The hope is that we will learn from history, change current unjust practices and prevent anything similar in the future.

Respect Indigenous culture

The TRC has, secondly, asked churches to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, a religious teaching dating back to 1452 that was used to justify Europeans taking control of indigenous lands. It was based on the premise that Christianity and European culture were superior, while the “primitive” nature of indigenous “savages” made them unfit for controlling land and developing civilization. The Christian Reformed Church will consider a report on the Doctrine of Discovery at Synod 2016; it will be available for discussion in churches this fall. Other denominations, such as Anglican, have already taken this step. While it is fairly easy to say this doctrine was in error, the challenge lies in redressing the harm it caused.

One way for churches to do that, says the TRC, is to respect and support the right of indigenous people to “manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies” (48 ii, p. 5). In the past, indigenous religious practices were often banned, regarded as heathen or dismissed as culturally backward. A related recommendation asks provinces that fund faith-based schools to require a comparative religions course that includes teaching about indigenous spiritual beliefs
What might Abraham Kuyper teach us as we prepare to go to the polls later this year? I believe that he can help us to vote more intelligently by clarifying the true nature of representation in a democratic political community.

We Canadians are blessed to live in a representative democracy. Approximately every four years Canadians elect people to represent them—to govern on their behalf—in the House of Commons. But what exactly is representation? Political scientists generally have two answers to this question.

First, a representative may act as a trustee of the public interest. A trustee does not vote on instruction from those she is called to represent. Rather she employs her own good judgement and does what she believes to be in the best interest of the public she serves. In a country divided into electoral districts, or ridings, the member of parliament looks out, not just for those in her riding, but for the entire political community.

Of course, this may not always be popular with those who elected her. The 18th-century statesman Edmund Burke discovered this while attempting to gain re-election in Bristol, the riding he represented in the British House of Commons. In a meeting with the Bristol electors in 1774, he articulated his position as follows:

His unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. . . . Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.

For all Burke’s undoubted eloquence, he failed to persuade the people who had just put him in office and was defeated the next time around.

Tied to voters?

Second, a representative may be considered merely an agent or delegate of the voters. During a candidates’ debate and practices, to be developed in conjunction with indigenous elders.

Showing respect for religious practices with which one may disagree can be challenging for Christians who are eager to proclaim the gospel, but doing so fosters more receptivity than condemning other practices does. In schools where passing on religious beliefs from parents to children is a central purpose, this can be particularly challenging.

Religious and cultural practices are always intertwined. The TRC serves us by opening our eyes to see how European cultural attitudes were mixed with the gospel to harm others. Through respectful and appreciative dialogue, including respectful disagreement, we may find new pathways to practice the unity of the gospel and the richness of cultural diversity, launched at Pentecost and celebrated in Revelations 7.

Work for just relations

A major TRC request is for churches, as well as governments, to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for what just relations might look like in Canada. Thirty-nine of the 94 recommendations refer to the Declaration, reflecting its importance for our indigenous neighbors. Churches are asked to show how they will implement the Declaration by March 31, 2016.

At this point, Canada has officially endorsed the Declaration but has not moved to implement it in Canada. Most members of churches in Canada know little about it or the other human rights covenants that, together, provide a helpful framework for a rights-respecting culture. Even if one can assume agreement with the general principles in the Declaration, translating them into practical actions will be a challenge.

Progress on almost all indigenous issues, including the Declaration, has stalled because of a power struggle between the federal government and indigenous leaders. Active leadership by the churches on implementation of the Declaration might help to break the deadlock and at least move forward on urgent issues, such as education for indigenous children and child welfare. Taking feasible steps forward and avoiding steps backward, called progressive realization, is an accepted way to implement covenants like the Declaration. Making progress in some areas, along with a process to clarify more complex provisions is more productive than the current stalling over the meaning of a few phrases in the document.

A big task

If Christians take the recommendations of the TRC seriously, we have some significant questions to honestly and fully discuss. It will mean some significant changes in attitudes, policies and practices within churches. And I know, without a doubt, that our country will benefit from robust engagement by church members in the public arena to achieve the reconciliation that all sides genuinely desire.

Kathy Vandergrift is a public policy analyst; she lives in Ottawa.

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Repentant giants

Woodrow Dixon

“David and Goliath” is the archetype for underdog stories. The young man, David, without sword or armour, goes to fight Goliath, bristling with armour and weaponry. David faces him as a champion for God’s people, with nothing but a sling, stones and his faith in the God of his people. There’s something in us that loves seeing the underdog win.

When we see the boy standing in the face of the giant, in some small way, we see ourselves. I think that’s why this story has worked itself so deeply into our cultural consciousness. Almost all of us have come from privilege, in a global context. Yet every one of us knows what it’s like to fail, to struggle with how we feel or struggle to succeed at something difficult. A story like David and Goliath gives us hope, and hope is something we need more of.

But if everyone is walking around thinking of themselves as the underdog, the hero in their own story, it makes me wonder: Who gets to be Goliath? It could be temptation – booze or porn or cigarettes. But not in every moment of our lives. For David, Goliath wasn’t a metaphor. Goliath was a man who wanted to murder him.

Do you think that Goliath thought of himself as the “Goliath” of his own story? The Philistines had the best farmland on that coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The Israelites weren’t a native people, but had come generations before from the desert, picking fights with everybody already living there. In Goliath’s own mind, was he a monster there to destroy Israel, or was he the one man strong enough to stand for his people in the face of an invading army?

Maybe it depends on who you ask. I suspect that everyone imagines himself the David in his own story. We can think that, even while we’re being Goliath.

Goliath in disguise

Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, holds a Bible Study on Wednesday night. A man joins their service, before eventually pulling out a gun and murdering nine people. He’s 21 years old. He’s white. He hates people of colour. He got that gun for his 21st birthday, and he thought that by doing what he did, he’d spark a new kind of civil war, a war to retake and remake the United States as he thinks it should be.

I found myself wondering, does he see himself as David, or Goliath? And when the narrative isn’t about one man committing a racist, homicidal atrocity, but about one man fighting for the world that he believes in, I can’t help but wonder if he thought of himself more as a David.

Here’s the point: if he could delude himself into thinking that he was doing something good, then it really is possible for anyone to be on the wrong side of history and imagine that their cause is righteous.

In our world there are delusional people – people who justify the most awful things in the name of their cause. And we can, in a moment of pain, find ourselves unthinkingly playing the villain in someone else’s story. But God doesn’t get confused in the middle of all this chaos.

God was with David when David went out to face Goliath because David was standing for God’s people. From the moment that God found Abraham and said, “I will be your God and you will be my people,” God loved Israel. David struck down Goliath because God’s will for his people and his world cannot be defeated, no matter how big the giant is who rises up against him.

Our world really is full of giants, and sometimes we’re them. We act like Goliath. How many of our righteous causes are Goliaths in disguise? How much of our outrage, our indignation, our church-divides or our willingness to turn our backs on each other is our siding with Goliath? Racism is prejudice, and prejudice is just a kind of hate, and humans have been finding excuses to hate each other for a long, long time. Hate is a giant in our world. But Jesus says, Behold, I am making all things new. A new way of being human, a new kind of kingdom, where we love one another because when we were lost and unlovable, God loved us anyway.

God has a will and a vision for our world that doesn’t include hate, or racism, or division. We’re all capable of being Goliath – of finding ourselves on the wrong side of righteousness, all the while being sure of how right we are. We’re all capable of thinking that we’re David, when we’re not. But our hope is that, even when we go so wrong, God’s will for our world is unstoppable. No number of racist gunmen will change Jesus’ message: Love each other, as I have loved you. And in the end, the Kingdom of God will be full of repentant giants, when God has finished making all things new.

Hasty absolution

John Van Sloten

I am ashamed to admit this, but when I hear news stories about people forgiving others immediately after serious offenses, there’s a cynical part of me that judges them.

It happened again last month after the Charleston, South Carolina church shootings. Less than 24 hours after that horrible event, I was reading news reports describing how the victims’ family members had already offered forgiveness to shooter Dylann Roof.

How naive! Are you kidding me? How can anyone possibly do that?

They couldn’t have even begun to process their grief, so any gesture of forgiveness at this point had to be premature. In order to truly forgive, you have to fully understand the nature and impact of the grievance. How could that possibly have happened in so short a time?

Sadly, there was a part of me that would not accept absolution offered this spontaneously, like it was quick or free.

Flowers for the victims of the shooting placed near a police barricade in Charleston, South Carolina.

Then, two days after the shooting, I heard the voice of a young girl from Charleston tearfully speaking words of forgiveness to the killer in the courtroom.

And I began to understand.

There was something about the innocence and urgency of her words that struck me. It was as though she had to get the forgiveness out, like she had no choice. In order for her to be whole again, to be free of the terrible weight of hatred and scorn, she had to forgive the shooter as quickly as possible! And so she did.

There was something about her tone that rung so true; it was so human. It was as though she was echoing the voice of God and imaging her Maker’s way-too-quick-to-forgive heart.

While we were yet sinners

Could it be God is that innocent and pure? That he is unable to hold anger and scorn and hatred toward others? That he’s prone to forgive just as quickly, so that he can remain whole?

If anyone has reason to withhold or delay forgiveness it’s God. Our sins, relative to God’s holiness and perfection, are far more heinous than any murderer’s. Yet God forgives. He forgives again and again. And all of his forgiving happens in the context of very fleeting human lifetimes. Our eternal God forgives human beings for serious sins within hours, days, months, years or decades. Relatively speaking, how is this any different than a young girl spontaneously forgiving a man who’s just murdered someone in her family?

Which makes me think that maybe quick forgiveness isn’t the enemy of long-term forgiveness at all. What if it’s a necessary first step to a deeper, more considered forgiveness?

Jesus once told Peter that he needed to forgive those who...
Hank de Jong’s article on child sponsorship as offered by humanitarian agencies (“Pitfalls of Child Sponsorship,” June 8, 2015) raises some interesting issues. However, it seems based on several misconceptions, both in terms of the motivation of donors and of the agencies themselves in establishing such a program. Please allow me to deal with some of the issues he’s raised.

Child sponsorship programs, such as those established by World Vision and other aid agencies, allow individual Canadians to connect directly with children in a developing country while supporting efforts to provide better, safer and healthier lives for people in need. World Vision is always very clear that funds donated by generous Canadians are never given directly to children and their families, but instead are pooled and provided to communities in countries where we operate. In consultation with local leaders, World Vision works directly with communities to provide immediate needs (food, water, education and sanitation services) but also to promote long-term projects that offer people the chance to learn new skills to increase their income and provide better opportunities for their children’s future. Through this approach, all of the children in the community benefit, not just the sponsored child. And World Vision is there for the long haul, spending as much as 15 years working with communities to build change that lasts.

Although Mr. de Jong asserts “these children will not die without our support,” the evidence gathered by World Vision and other international aid organizations offers a different picture. More than 6 million children around the world die every year from a lack of access to basics such as nutritious food, clean water and medical care, and millions of others suffer physical and emotional damage from child labour and other forms of exploitation. World Vision doesn’t probe the motivations of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who sponsor children through our organization, but we believe they feel a genuine commitment to live out Christ’s doctrine to love their fellow human beings and help the poor, the weak and the vulnerable.

Marketing is an essential tool that World Vision uses to reach out and encourage Canadians to take part in our sponsorship programs, both at an individual level or as part of a larger group through their workplace or church community. Our commitment to openness and transparency in our operations has won us numerous national awards and we are proud to tell Canadians that over 80 percent of the money donated to our organization is spent on programming work.

Child sponsorship may not fit every organization’s needs. But for more than 60 years, World Vision has used it to change the lives of hundreds of thousands of children around the world for the better. Along the way, thousands of Canadians have forged life-long relationships with their sponsored children and watched with joy as they have grown into successful and happy adults.

Charlie Fluit
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer
World Vision Canada

Reitsma Bick is an award-winning writer who has written for the majority of the major denominations and has been a contributor to Christian Courier. She joined the Word Guild in 2009 and was the first Christian Courier writer to win a Word Guild award. Her book “Full Circle: Dozens of Canadian Christian writers and journalists were honoured for excellence in a variety of categories, including novels, non-fiction books, articles, poetry and song lyrics.”

Reitsma Bick was also shortlisted for her long feature “A Look at the Going Rate” (March 10, 2014), her profile “Twice-captured South Sudanese Lost Boy Advocates for Peace” (June 9, 2014) and her editorial “Video Games: Minefield or Mission Field?” (Oct. 13, 2014).

On June 11, she participated in the Word Guild’s Editors’ Panel, an event for freelance writers. Peter Schuurman, frequent contributor to CC, was shortlisted for his article “The Hymn in Christ: Re-Invigorating Denominational Culture” (Sept. 22, 2014).

“These awards testify to the relevance CC has within the broader writing community,” Reitsma Bick says, “and I’m thankful for the credibility this type of recognition brings to our publication.”

Charlie Fluit is the senior pastor of New Hope Church in Calgary, and the author of “Your Job is a Parable.”

John Van Sloten is the senior pastor of New Hope Church in Calgary, and the author of The Day Metallica Came to Church. His second book, Your Job is a Parable (Navpress) will be out in 2017.
U.S.: Supreme Court same-sex marriage decision threatens religious liberty, say dissenting justices

Marian Van Til
WASHINGTON, D.C. — Two weeks ago the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5-4 vote, ruled that every state must allow and legally recognize same-sex marriage, nullifying dissenting votes taken in many states. Lost amidst the celebrations of those favoring the decision was the alarm sounded by the four dissenting justices (Roberts, Scalia, Alito, Thomas) regarding its implications for religious freedom in America.

Chief Justice John Roberts noted, “Many good and decent people oppose same-sex marriage as a tenet of faith, and their freedom to exercise religion is — unlike the right imagined by the majority — actually spelled out in the Constitution. Respect for sincere religious conviction has led voters and legislators in every State that has adopted same-sex marriage democratically to include accommodations for religious practice. The majority’s decision imposing same-sex marriage cannot, of course, create any such accommodations. The majority graciously suggests that religious believers may continue to ‘advocate’ and ‘teach’ their views of marriage. . . . The First Amendment protects the freedom to ‘exercise’ religion. Ominously, that is not a word the majority uses.”

Roberts continued, “Hard questions arise when people of faith exercise religion in ways that may be seen to conflict with the new right to same-sex marriage — when, for example, a religious college provides married student housing only to opposite-sex married couples, or a religious adoption agency declines to place children with same-sex married couples. Indeed, the Solicitor General candidly acknowledged that the tax exemptions of some religious institutions would be in question if they opposed same-sex marriage democratically to include accommodations for religious practice. The majority’s decision imposing same-sex marriage cannot, of course, create any such accommodations. The majority graciously suggests that religious believers may continue to ‘advocate’ and ‘teach’ their views of marriage. . . . The First Amendment protects the freedom to ‘exercise’ religion. Ominously, that is not a word the majority uses.”

Roberts was also “discouraged” by what he called “the extent to which the majority feels compelled to silice those on the other side of the debate.” The majority offered “a cursory assurance that it does not intend to disparage people who, as a matter of conscience, cannot accept same-sex marriage,” he said. But “that disclaimer is hard to square with the very next sentence, in which the majority explains that ‘the necessary consequence’ of laws codifying the traditional definition of marriage is to ‘demean[n] or stigmatize[ ]’ same-sex couples. The majority reiterates such characterizations over and over. . . . It is one thing for the majority to conclude that the Constitution protects a right to same-sex marriage; it is something else to portray everyone who does not share the majority’s ‘better informed understanding’ as bigoted.”

‘Short-circuits the process’

Justice Clarence Thomas asserted that the decision “threatens religious liberty.” He called attention to numerous amicus briefs the court had received. They cautioned that asserting a new constitutional right to same-sex marriage will “have unavoidable and wide-ranging implications for religious liberty,” with many noting that “in our society, marriage is not simply a governmental institution; it is a religious institution as well.” Thomas wrote, “It appears all but inevitable that the two will come into conflict, particularly as individuals and churches are confronted with demands to participate in and endorse civil marriages between same-sex couples.”

But, he said, “The majority appears unmoved by that inevitability. It makes only a weak gesture toward religious liberty in a single paragraph. . . . And even that gesture indicates a misunderstanding of religious liberty in our Nation’s tradition. Religious liberty is about more than just the protection for ‘religious organizations and persons . . . as they seek to teach the principles that are so fulfilling and so central to their lives and faiths.’ Religious liberty is about freedom of action in matters of religion generally, and the scope of that liberty is directly correlated to the civil restraints placed upon religious practice.” The majority “refused to allow the definition of marriage to be left to the political process as the Constitution requires,” said Thomas. “Instead, the majority’s decision short-circuits that process, with potentially ruinous consequences for religious liberty.”

Usurps the people’s rights

Justice Samuel Alito also said the court-majority’s decision “usurps the constitutional right of the people to decide whether to keep or alter the traditional understanding of marriage.” And “the decision will also have other important consequences. It will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy. In the course of its opinion, the majority compares traditional marriage laws to laws that denied equal treatment for African-Americans and women. . . . The implications of this analogy will be exploited by those who are determined to stamp out every vestige of dissent. . . . I assume that those who cling to old beliefs will be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes, but if they repeat those views in public, they will risk being labeled as bigots and treated as such by governments, employers and schools. . . . By imposing its own views on the entire country, the majority facilitates the marginalization of the many Americans who have traditional ideas.”

Justice Antonin Scalia said the assenting justices’ assertion that there is a “fundamental right” to same-sex marriage afforded by the Constitution’s 14th amendment means that “every State violated the Constitution for all of the 135 years between the Fourteenth Amendment’s ratification and Massachusetts’ permitting of same-sex marriages in 2003.” (The 14th Amendment was adopted in 1868, post-Civil War, in order to ensure that former slaves born or naturalized in the U.S. were treated as citizens and had equal rights and protection under the law.)

Scalia is particularly concerned that the court is usurping power that is not granted by the Constitution. He wrote, this “decree says that my Ruler, and the Ruler of 320 million Americans coast-to-coast, is a majority of the nine lawyers on the Supreme Court. The opinion in these cases is the furthest extension in fact — and the furthest extension one can even imagine — of the Court’s claimed power to create ‘liberties’ that the Constitution and its Amendments neglect to mention. This practice of constitutional revision by an unelected committee of nine, always accompanied . . . by extravagant praise of liberty, robs the People of the most important liberty they asserted in the Declaration of Independence and won in the Revolution of 1776: the freedom to govern themselves.”

In May, Christian Courier published a news report on Wybe Bylsma, a CRC man from Ontario visiting Kathmandu when the earthquake struck, initially presumed lost.
Bylsma survived and plans to return to Nepal to continue his missions work. Here are excerpts of the experience in his own words; a full version of his story can be found online at christiancourier.ca

On the (shaky) ground in Nepal

Wybe Bylsma

Since people were afraid to sleep inside, everyone tried to find a spot to sit and sleep. Ram, Dappa and I went to a nearby “merchant mall,” where the crude, slatted tables were being used as beds. One merchant opened a nearby shop for us, so that I could buy a heavy blanket. We claimed an empty table and tested it. All three of us could lie on it and cover ourselves with this one blanket. Great! We were all set for nightlife.

Dappa and I began playing chess next to a tall building. As soon as the ground rumbled, we ran to the nearby street. I could see the tall building swaying gently. An eerie sight, especially when Dappa and I had just been sitting in its shade.

Bathrooms were not available in this area, so people from this “merchant mall” area had to squat pants-down in the open area outside the bamboo-covered stalls. Especially at dawn, you had to be careful where you walked. I suggested to the merchant that we dig some toilets, but all he could come up with was a rickety shovel.

The trauma of this devastating earthquake will take quite some time to fade away, especially for those who had difficulty escaping from a swaying building — like Ram during the second quake that followed several weeks later, or who had been trapped underneath one — like Pemba.
Christian Reformed Church Synod 2015 summary

Marian Van Til, based on Synod News Office reports by Gayla Postma, George Yin, Julie Jansen, Clayton Libolt, Roxanne Van Farowe. Photos credit: Karen Huttenga and The Banner.

Synod gets updated on the CRC’s ‘joyously unique’ work in Canada

The CRC’s Canadian ministries director, Rev. Darren Rooorda, shared with delegates his excitement about a change of focus regarding the CRC’s various ministries in Canada. Instead of focusing primarily on a few specifically Canadian ministries, the CRC is seeing ministry in Canada in the context of a bi-national church, he said. “If you can’t tell, my chest is sticking out just a little bit further now. That’s a good thing.” Rooorda said he wants to showcase the uniqueness of ministry in Canada as an integral part of the denomination.

On the CRC’s “Ministry in Canada” web-pages (crcna.org/Canada), the “binationality” is described this way, which reflects what Rooorda told synod delegates: “One half of our binational context is ministry in Canada — and it is joyously unique. The national differences are seen in approaches to social policy, cultural multiplicity, governmental structure, all the way to differing local contexts and distinctive attitudes or behaviours. As such, doing ministry in Canada demands that all the components of the denomination address the uniqueness that is experienced north of the border as much as it does in the USA. . . . Canada has a long history with the Christian Reformed Church. It began here in 1914 in Alberta and is now country wide. Particular ministries have arisen from within our context such as the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, our Aboriginal Ministry Centres, and partner groups like Diaconal Ministries Canada. We invite you to explore the pages and information provided here to get a full grasp on how the bi-national church finds a distinct context in the Great White North.”

The CRC in North America consists of a quarter-million people in about 1,100 congregations, 25 percent of which are in Canada.

CRC head sees ‘glass half full,’ not half empty

“Let me clear up a misconception,” CRC executive director Dr. Steven Timmerman-stold synod delegates. “I hear over and over ‘We’re shrinking, ministry shares are declining.’ We have a wonderful way of seeing the glass half empty. We are a dour bunch. The news around us can make us discouraged.”

But Timmerman insisted the church has turned a corner. “God is blessing us fairly stable. “We are blessed with the resource-fulness of our Korean brothers and sisters” are helping the CRC to assume a posture of prayer. He concluded, “It’s not about the numbers. . . . We have to avoid hoping in ourselves, our accomplishments. Our hope is grounded in the Word of God. . . . We should remain patiently hopeful. Whether the glass is half empty or half full, it is God who holds the glass — and us — in his hands.”

Meanwhile, Synod made an exception to its own rules regarding commissioned pastors in order to recognize Timmerman’s role in ministering to the whole denomination. He was recently examined and approved by Classis Grand Rapids East as a commissioned pastor.

Ordinarily, commissioned pastors serve only in the classis in which they are ordained. But synod decided that Timmerman’s ordination should apply throughout the denomination, opening the way for him to be invited to preach in any CRC church. Timmerman is the first executive director who is not an ordained minister of the Word, an exception granted by Synod 2013 with the provision that he be ordained as an office-bearer. Synod said, “It is important for the executive director to be seen as serving the whole denomination and not only in those classes that choose to recognize him as a commissioned pastor.”

Deacons given role in denominational decision-making

Some classes have already included deacons in their deliberations, but with the Church Order changes now approved, each church will send an elder, deacon, and a minister to classis meetings unless “great distance or other weighty reasons” prevent them from doing so.

The original impetus for the change was a request in 2010 that synod redefine the role of deacons by making changes to the Church Order. Subsequent synods have heard from two task forces that studied the issue. The changes now adopted were proposed by Synod 2013.

Synod okays unifying Home and World Missions

Synod overwhelmingly approved a proposal to unify Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions into one global mission agency. The mandate for the newly unified agency is to “give leadership to the denomination in its task of bringing the gospel holistically to the people of North America and the world, and drawing them into fellowship with Christ and his church.”

The two agencies have often worked closely in the past, but the leaders of the agencies called the unification “timely, strategic and stewarded.” Colín Watson, Sr., the CRC’s director of ministries and administration who is also a previous board president of World Missions, told delegates, “Most people groups are no longer bound by geographies. Now strategies used by agencies can be exchanged by each agency to be more effective in obedience to God’s call.”

The CRC in North America consists of a quarter-million people in about 1,100 congregations, 25 percent of which are in Canada.

Delegates ponder pastoral response to same-sex marriage

Delegates share ideas in a “listening session” about how churches can respond pastorally in a variety of situations involving same-sex marriage.

Rev. Rolf Bouma, chair of the synodically appointed Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re: Same Sex Marriage, introduced the session by calling attention to the committee’s mandate, then to the very rapidly changing social situation across North America regarding same-sex marriage, which is now legal in all of Canada and the U.S.

The committee’s mandate instructs it to “give guidance and clarification” on the issue to churches and pastors. Bouma emphasized that the committee was specifically instructed not to revisit the denominational stance on homosexuality, but to “address the cultural and legal aspects of same-sex marriage as they impact the church and its ministry.” The committee will report to Synod 2016, but has adopted a “shepherding model” which engages the church in conversation while the committee completes its work. The committee has also held listening sessions with various classes and other groups within the CRC. It will gather the results of the small group discussions and include them in its deliberations.

Delegates were put into small groups and presented with three topics for discussion. The first two were potential pastoral situations: the baptism of a child of a same-sex couple and the same-sex marriage of a child of a church leader. The third presented four views of the relationship between civil marriage and religious marriage in order to consider a Reformed perspective on such a relationship.

Synod News Office

In a historic move, delegates voted to expand the role of deacons in denominational decision-making by allowing deaconal delegates to synods.

Throughout Reformed church history, only elders and ministers have had “ruling” authority in the church. Delegates to classis meetings have been comprised of elders and ministers. And classical delegations to synod have consisted of two pastors and two elders. But from now on in the CRC, each delegation to synod will consist of a minister, an elder, a deacon and one additional office-bearer (minister, an elder, or deacon).

Learning to let go

Two months ago I wrote about someone calling me a rut dweller. That man was actually a realtor, here to list our farm. He sat at our kitchen table, assuring me that life goes on, even after leaving one’s home of 37 years. Honestly, I wasn’t so sure.

Jack and I had been thinking about moving for quite some time. His arthritis has progressed and a change in lifestyle seemed the most logical strategy. Still, it wasn’t a decision to be made lightly. We hardly knew where to begin.

I fought back tears as the realtor talked about selling our place. When he left I prayed that the process wouldn’t drag out. Within two weeks of listing we received a decent offer. The same day we accepted that offer, we immediately made a bid on another farm that we had looked at previously. It happened so quickly and went so smoothly we were almost giddy. God answered our prayers swiftly and fully.

But now the concept of leaving was turning into reality. We still had the summer ahead of us to enjoy here. I vowed to savour every sunset, blossom and bird’s song. My evening walks have become particularly precious. The excitement of moving to a new place is offset with considerable sadness at leaving this place behind.

There’s a lot to think about, not the least of which is how to weed through 37 years’ worth of accumulated belongings. We’re moving to a lovely big house, but who wants to lug truckloads of stuff that should have been tossed years ago? This is my golden opportunity to purge and organize.

So when someone mentioned Marie Kondo’s book – The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up, I couldn’t resist buying a copy. It’s been both entertaining and enlightening. A Japanese entrepreneur, Ms. Kondo makes her living tidying and decluttering clients’ homes. Her book has sold over two million copies worldwide and topped the New York Times Best Seller list.

Kondo’s unique criterion for keeping or tossing something is whether or not it “sparks joy” in the heart of its owner. It’s more about intuition than reason. In the end a person is presumably surrounded only by things that they genuinely love, plus a few absolute essentials.

‘Hold everything lightly’

I’m not sure if she’s an anistim, mystic or nut bar, but Kondo seriously suggests that we thank our belongings for their faithful service and treat them with due respect. When something no longer sparks joy in us, we can simply express our gratitude and dismiss it to be of use to someone else or send it to the trash. She insists that all of our possessions be sorted by category in a very specific order, starting with clothing.

I can’t bring myself to talk to my socks, but I admit that I should appreciate my belongings a little more and be grateful for the comfort they afford. Kondo’s technique (the “KonMari Method”) is brutal but effective. I cheered when I read of her clients victoriously dumping bags full of surplus clothing. But I shuddered at the thought of getting rid of almost all of the books on my shelves. Not happening! I gasped at the idea of trashing old cheek books. (Has she never heard of Canada Rev?). And I nearly fainted when she suggested that we dispose of all instruction manuals for appliances and electronics! According to her, if you ever have a problem with some gizmo, you just poke buttons until it works or look up the instructions online. Clearly I’m not ready to become a true KonMari disciple.

I did sift through my tee shirts, blouses and sweaters as she instructed – holding each item to determine whether it still brought joy to my heart. Joy is such a complex issue, isn’t it? I ended up filling a few bags with clothing I haven’t worn in the last two years. I can almost hear the decluttering guru chiding me for being too rational. Tisk, tisk!

It’s the tip of the iceberg, really. I have a long way to go – a houseful to sort – before I’m ready to move. Who knows, maybe by the time I work through it all I’ll be much more in tune with my inner joy. Or not.

I can relate better to Corrie ten Boom’s philosophy. She once said, “Hold everything in your hands lightly, otherwise it hurts when God pries your fingers open.” Truly, I have far too many possessions and I’m far too attached to them. I have to learn to let go of the excess, even to let go of this place so that I can hold onto the Lord with both hands and embrace the future he has in mind for me.

Bring on the boxes.

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Non-fiction: Feed your mind

Recommended by Christian Courier readers

The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization
by Vishal Mangalwadi
This book considers the West through Eastern eyes, finding what is good about the West – democracy, rule of law, justice, compassion, respect for persons, relative equality, limited corruption and bribery, the pursuit of science, medicine, stewardship – all derive from the Bible and are lacking where there is no biblical influence. All religions are not equal. The book traces how God’s word shaped western culture and asks the unsettling question: can the West flourish without the Bible?
—Nick Loenen

Immaculée Ilfibagiza’s thrilling story Left to Tell is one of horror, devastation and yet an unimaginable faith in God. Immaculée grew up in a perfect world, loved by family, friends and her whole community, but in 1994 her entire life was torn apart by the Rwandan Genocide. Immaculée fully relies on God’s power to surround and protect her and learns God can use her as an inspiration to other people even through the darkest of times.
—Andrea Weesjes

In the autobiography Gifted Hands, we meet pioneering American neurosurgeon Ben Carson. Carson honestly shares how he was raised by a godly single mother. Throughout, the reader gains a strong sense of God’s providential guidance in his life, including how he overcame his temper, managed to work his way through school and used his gifted hands to help desperate people. The descriptions of the difficult cases are moving, but each time the glory goes to God.
—Harriette Mostert
Playing God

Walter Miedema

Ex Machina takes its name from the phrase “Deus ex machina” (pronounced with a “k” not a “ch” sound). Used in ancient Greek theatre, it literally translates “God from the machine.” The film plays with the concepts of what a god is, what a machine is, how these concepts relate to our humanity and ultimately what that means for whoever is in control of the situation.

As the film opens, Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), a programmer at a Googlesque search engine company, has won the opportunity to spend a week with the company’s founder Nathan (Oscar Isaac) at his secluded residence. Upon arrival, Caleb discovers that his prize vacation will be different than he had planned. After confessing that his home is also a top secret research facility and making Caleb sign an ironclad non-disclosure agreement, Nathan gives him a key-card with access to all the rooms in his home, excepting a few. Nathan explains that he has been using much of his wealth to research artificial intelligence (AI) and that he has brought Caleb there to perform a type of “Turing Test,” a classic test of artificial intelligence systems that is deemed passed if a human can not accurately determine whether they are communicating with a human or a machine. The twist with this test is that Ava (Alicia Vikander), Nathan’s AI, is quite obviously a machine, and Nathan wants Caleb to determine whether “she” truly has consciousness or a soul.

Early in their discussions about AI, Caleb and Nathan discuss what the criteria of his test should be and mention an early classic type of AI, the chess playing computer. They decide that it cannot be truly said to be conscious because it isn’t aware that it’s playing a game. So the question in regards to Ava is, “Does she know that she’s playing chess?” From that point the film becomes a mental game of chess that keeps you guessing about who holds the advantage.

An added wrinkle to the mental chess game being played is Ava’s sexuality. The AI that Caleb is evaluating is very much embodied as female. When Caleb questions Nathan about this and asks Nathan if he programmed Ava to “like” him, Nathan insists that sexuality is a component of human intelligence and therefore an appropriate component of a fully fleshed AI. The fact that Ava’s sexuality has an effect on Caleb’s objectivity is clear.

Critics have described the movie as an “uncommonly engaging sci-fi feature.”

The character of Nathan functions as a metaphorical mad god, obsessed with his own power and ideas. It is obvious that he feels creating an intelligence as sophisticated as Ava has elevated his status. His godhood has come as a result of the machine he has created.

Power and ideas. It is obvious that he feels creating an intelligence as sophisticated as Ava, who holds the advantage. From that point the film becomes a mental game of chess that keeps you guessing about who holds the advantage.

The film is structured around a number of “sessions” during which Caleb conducts his test of Ava. Even before their first meeting literal cracks appear, suggesting that everything is not as it seems. As Caleb questions her, Ava herself questions the validity of the test when she asks “what happens if I don’t pass your test?” and after Caleb claims it’s not up to him, she responds “why is it up to anyone?” In a later session she playfully turns the tables on Caleb by questioning him and asking “Are you a good person?” It’s an interaction that basically asks, “does anyone have the right to determine your value and whether you qualify as sufficiently ‘human’?” As the sessions progress, Ava becomes more human in behaviour, but also visually as more of her mechanical parts are replaced.

The chapters on “Right, Wrong, and the Moral God” and “Free Will, Moral Responsibility and the Infinite, Just God” are less convincing. Here Lanier’s use of a summary of opposing arguments exposes a major weakness in his project. Not only is that missing in the book, Lanier too easily dismisses relevant critique of Christianity in these chapters and treats the well-defined legal process of a court trial, the jury of readers, after a caution about being biased against Christianity that draws attention to cause the home’s power to temporarily surge and shut down the cameras that Nathan is using to view and record the session. During one of these shutdowns mid-session she warns Caleb that Nathan is not to be trusted. The audience is left to wonder if she’s genuine, or playing a game.

Ex Machina clearly has much to say on how humans view themselves as creative beings and how we view that power in relationship to others, especially those we might consider less human, and to God.

Is Christianity reasonable?

Kathy Vandergrift

Imagine you are in a court room; the truth of Christianity is on trial, and you are the jury. Mark Lanier, an accomplished U.S. litigation lawyer, uses this approach to prove that it is reasonable to believe that God exists, that the resurrection happened and that you, the reader, can have a personal relationship with God. The judicial process makes this book different than the many books that test the claims of Christianity with a scientific method. The rules of evidence in a court room are different than in a laboratory; they seem more appropriate to test the credibility of claims that originate in a pre-scientific period of history. The burden of proof is also different. For this purpose, the case is won if Christianity is more likely to be true than to be false.

This book reminds us that the scientific method is not the only way to establish reliability. The well-defined legal process of a court trial, especially the discovery phase, is an accepted process for determining credibility of a claim. The common sense standard of proof seems closer to the way most people make decisions and addresses the popular skepticism about the believability of Christianity. Because Lanier wants to convince the jury of readers, the text is easy to read, sprinkled with stories of Lanier’s experiences as a lawyer and a defender of the Christian faith.

In building his case, Lanier recognizes that direct evidence is limited but crucial. Of particular interest is his use of panels of expert witnesses to support arguments such as the existence of God, the human condition and salvation through Christ. The eclectic list of witnesses includes experts from ancient culture to current pop singers, across all disciplines. Expected names like the disciplines, C.S. Lewis and Charles Colson are combined with surprises, such as B.F. Skinner, Friedrich Nietzsche, Adolf Hitler, Charles Darwin and Nick Bostrom.

Compelling arguments for the existence of God and the nature of the Christian God draw on Lanier’s extensive knowledge of ancient cultures, as well as his legal skills. Of special note is the emphasis on the Communicating God, the use of Noam Chomsky as an expert witness to testify that humans are hard-wired to send and receive messages, and the use of bio-linguistics to explain divine revelation and prayer.

The chapters on “Right, Wrong, and the Moral God” and “Free Will, Moral Responsibility and the Infinite, Just God” are less convincing. Here Lanier’s use of a summary of opposing arguments exposes a major weakness in his project. Not only is that missing in the book, Lanier too easily dismisses relevant critique of Christianity in these chapters and treats the complex interplay of human choice, the power of evil and good, and God’s will working through human affairs.

For the closing argument, Lanier resorts to a strong personal appeal to convince the jury of readers, after a caution about being biased against Christianity that draws on allegations of a biased jury in the trial of O.J. Simpson, not a shining example of God’s will working through human affairs.

Would this book convince an unbeliever? Well-informed skeptics would likely poke significant holes in his case. The strength of Lanier’s own convictions may sway others. The book can, however, be useful to help readers who are believers think through their beliefs and join contemporary discussions about the believability of what Christians profess through study groups or exchanges with friends who are not Christians.
Curating social media and faith

In this digital age of Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter and Facebook, we have all become curators of what we see. Are we curating spaces of love and acceptance and authenticity, or do we display closed circles, a sense of shame, or an unwillingness to share our stories with transparency or wrestle with honest questions?

Chris Janssens
Curator: a keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection.
Synonyms: manager, guardian, keeper, steward

In this digital age of Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter and Facebook, we have all become curators of what we see. In the art world, a curator carefully selects pieces to put on display for the public to view. In the same way, we have control over a variety of platforms to exhibit chosen words and images to our audience. These displays eventually become extensions of ourselves, a collage that reflects who we are or, perhaps more accurately in some cases, how we would like to be perceived. It is our privilege to assemble these snapshots. They tell our stories.

Social media is a fun way to share what is going on in our lives, to document events and to create connections. The snapshots and words that we select to display are our version of the story we wish to tell with our lives. I wonder if, through all of the filters and pins and hashtags, what we’re really trying to do is point to what is meaningful to us, hoping that others will enjoy it as well. Maybe we’re attempting to knock out all of the mundane gaps of life and assemble a pithy highlight reel of the high notes. Maybe I’m totally wrong. Some people might argue that social media acts like a mask, that it allows us to hide behind the screen and prop up a proposed version of ourselves. On the flip side, though, social media is a collection that makes up the narrative we choose to tell about ourselves.

Inspiration and authenticity

It is a study in perspective. This concept ties deeply to the way I live out my faith. If social media is about connection, if story is fundamentally about connection, and if the way I live out my faith is based on connection to God and to others, then it’s all inherently bound together? Instead of curating only through social media, I’ve been trying to think about how to expand this concept into real life. I want the two arenas to complement each other. My daily question to myself is: how do I curate inspiration and authenticity, both through the screen and in real life? What beauty am I offering beyond, say, Instagram, into the tangible? What do others see when they see me, my life, my story?

Of course, our faith is not a performance, but we have been called to be ambassadors of Christ. My personal challenge is to creatively explore what it looks like to curate an authentic life of unconditional love motivated by the Holy Spirit. Getting lots of likes on a post is great, but, in conjunction with that, what value am I offering to others when I interact with them in daily life? We all have so much to give. Time, conversation, space, an armload of gifts and talents – there are endless ways that we can curate an authentic life to inspire others in ways that a tweet just can’t on its own.

The actual plot

Curating authenticity begins with using your space and time as an asset and choosing to see story in the small things. When you start to see value and potential in the small, mundane moments, eventually you will begin to appreciate how small, yet essential, your story is in comparison to the grander one to which we are all intimately bound. We’re all linked, and our stories bounce off each other. Social media is a way of condensing these small moments but the real beauty, the actual plot, unfolds away from the filters in the raw moments of truth. The relationships we build take shape based on what we choose to curate with our lives.

Better than Instagram

Your story is important, but it is also very small. Just like all of our individual stories are connected under one platform such as Instagram or Facebook, all of our life stories, our faith stories, are joined together as part of the whole and they make up a larger story together. What we must ask ourselves, as individuals and small groups and churches, is this: what we are displaying for others to see? Are we curating spaces of love and acceptance and authenticity, or do we display closed circles, a sense of shame, or an unwillingness to share our stories with transparency or wrestle with honest questions? There should be something magnetically attractive about our homes and our communities. Our real lives should look better than they do on Instagram.

When you start to see value and potential in the small, mundane moments, eventually you will begin to appreciate how small, yet essential, your story is in comparison to the grander one to which we are all intimately bound. . . . The relationships we build take shape based on what we choose to curate with our lives.

I do not say this to induce guilt. Rather, I want to encourage us to expand our vision and explore our stories on a deeper level. This isn’t about something you need to do; it is about who you want to become. It is about living out a meaningful story. This could mean taking a risk or envisioning a new way to live out this next chapter of your life. It means inviting other people in. It means paying attention to the prompting you may be ignoring. It means praying in bold faith. Where do you need to take the next step?
Held by God on the Camino de Santiago: An interview with Louise and Jacob Westerhof

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

On April 17, 2015, Louise and Jacob Westerhof left their St. Catharines, Ontario, home to travel the Camino de Santiago, an 800 km pilgrimage which begins in France and leads to the shrine of the apostle St. James in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain. It is believed that the apostle was buried there.

Upon their return at the end of May, Louise and Jacob shared their story with CC.

Why did you decide to walk the Camino? What role did the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) that you, Louise, have lived with for the last 18 years play in your decision?

Louise: It wasn’t a snap decision, that’s for sure! The process took approximately three years. Jacob had read The Camino Letters by Julie Kirkpatrick about a woman who walked the Camino and thought about a specific person each day. I remember saying that would be a cool thing to do. However, Jacob didn’t share those feelings at the time. A year later, we watched the movie, The Way, and Jacob became excited, but I didn’t share his enthusiasm. We were undecided for a while. But when my MS symptoms improved after going through a “neuro program” at Hotel Dieu/Shaver Health and Rehabilitation Centre, we decided that if we didn’t do it now, we might never do it.

With such an extremely uncertain disease such as MS, you never know from one day to the next how your symptoms will present themselves. Also, my uncle, Fred Tiesma, and his 23-year-old son. They inspired me with their perseverance and comfort.

Who are some of the most memorable people you met along the way?

Louise: One of the most memorable persons was a woman explained that she was walking because of an inoperable tumor behind her knee. The man was walking because he had lost his 23-year-old son. They inspired me with their openness, their love for each other and the way they shared their faith. Each year they come back to walk another part of the Camino and, God willing, will someday arrive in Santiago.

What did you learn about yourselves, about God?

Louise: We felt that the harder the conditions while we prepared, the easier the Camino would be. We walked 50 km of the Bruce Trail in small sections until we felt that we could overcome any mountain. We had no idea the Camino would be so tough!

We also knew we would need the support of others during the five weeks of walking and so, through my blog (louisewesterhof.wordpress.com), we asked people to send us Bible verses, poems and songs for us to meditate on. On our first day of walking in the Pyrenees Mountains, we were exhausted beyond belief and wondered if this was really a good idea. We stopped for a break and I read Psalm 121 out loud. I cried because it fit perfectly what we were experiencing. We knew God was with us and would continue to be beside us.

What was it like to actually begin the pilgrimage after months of training?

Louise: Exhilarating! Scary! We just wanted to get over to Spain and begin walking the Camino. After arriving in St. Jean Pied du Port, France, we set out almost immediately and walked 8 km to our first destination. It was very difficult, but because of the beautiful countryside, we were walking open-mouthed, taking in the wonderful vistas.

What obstacles – physical, emotional, and spiritual – did you encounter?

Louise: Mountains, mountains and more mountains! We thought that once we crossed the Pyrenees, the mountains would end. Not so.

The majority of the Camino is either going up or going down. Shin splints, blisters, food poisoning, altitude sickness, major allergic reaction to adhesive tape, short-lived migraines, and small MS flare-ups affected us. God was before us, behind us, beneath us and beside us. We could feel his presence every day. Because we never knew where we’d be spending the night, I always prayed, “Please Lord, give us what we need.” He always delivered. Maybe not always what we wanted, but always what we needed.

What advice would you give to someone considering a similar pilgrimage?

Louise: Do your homework. Buy one of the Camino guidebooks that are readily available. Watch The Way. Read the blog of someone who has walked the Camino. Train with a full backpack. It’s recommended to only carry ten percent of your body weight, so pack smart. Finally, don’t walk the Camino alone. It’s generally considered a safe trail. However, tragedies do happen. We passed a number of memorials dedicated to people who lost their lives while walking, either from an accident or medical emergency. While we were walking, a young woman disappeared and, to the best of my knowledge, hasn’t been found. Have a good support system back home and know that God is with you.

Jacob: The people were more than half the experience, providing opportunity to learn from so many in an environment that promoted sharing. Many people openly expressed their reasons for walking the Camino. I remember in particular one French couple who shared a meal with me while Louise was recovering from food poisoning. In broken English, the woman explained that she was walking because of an inoperable tumor behind her knee. We walked, talked and laughed the entire time and cried when they left. The visit gave us the boost we needed to complete the remaining few days.

You used your pilgrimage to raise support for your local MS Society and Hotel Dieu Shaver Health and Rehabilitation Centre. How did the fundraising go?

Louise: I really wanted to give back to these two organizations that have helped me so much during my personal walk with MS. When I realized that the MS Walkathon would be happening while we were in Spain, we decided it would be a unique experience to combine our Camino walk with our local MS walkathon. We arranged it so people could donate to either organization. The fundraising went well. People were very generous.

What did you learn about yourselves, about your marriage and about God?

Louise: Two Bible verses carried me through the entire Camino. I was able to meditate on 2 Corinthians 12:10 and Philippians 4:13 during the days and nights. God was so apparent during the five weeks and that gave us strength and comfort.

Jacob and I like to hold hands when we walk and that continued while on the Camino. People continually commented on it and some wanted to take our picture. What they couldn’t see, but what we could feel was that God was beside us, holding our hands in his love.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.
Sabbath rest is active rest

Ian Marnoch

Keeping the Sabbath holy is not merely an opportunity to rest and recuperate from the week that has been. The Sabbath “was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27) so that we could rest from our normal pursuits and be reminded of God’s grace. The Sabbath was given by God so that we could set aside one day in seven to worship; to be empowered and energized for the week ahead; to actively refocus our minds, hearts and souls on God; and to be reminded of our role as God’s representatives in the world. Keeping Sabbath rest in a world that never stops refocuses the world’s attention on God who provides and sustains life. Sabbath rest, therefore, is active rest.

Mark 2:23-28 describes an event in which Jesus and his disciples were walking through a cornfield on the Sabbath. As they walked they grew hungry and picked at the corn. All of a sudden a group of religious leaders (It is a worthwhile exercise to think of these men not as Pharisees but as leaders of the established religion and then put ourselves in their place – as members and/or leaders of the established Christian church, how would we act in a similar situation?) popped up from among the cornstalks and challenged Jesus: “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”

God’s representatives

Sabbath law is mentioned many times in both Old and New Testaments. Here we look at the implications of this law as recorded in the book of Exodus (chapter 31:12-17), where God instructed Moses to tell the Israelites to mark the Sabbath day (the seventh day) by resting from all their ordinary labours in order that they would remember that it is God who created life; that it is God who brought people into the world. Here we look at the Sabbath as God’s representatives. Keeping the Sabbath also served as a sign of their covenant relationship with God and so served to reveal God’s covenantal faithfulness, provision and protection to the broader culture. This, therefore, allowed the people in the broader culture to observe God’s goodness through Israel.

If Israel failed to keep the Sabbath holy, they effectively misrepresented God. The implications of this were that the broader culture would not have the opportunity to be drawn into relationship with God. Therefore God issued the harsh command: “You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people” (Ex. 31:14).

Anyone who worked on the Sabbath implied that they didn’t trust God to provide their needs for the day (recall the Israelites’ collection of manna in the wilderness in Ex. 16:22-30). To break the Sabbath was to break trust; to break trust was to misrepresent God. It would be better that we were not a member of God’s people – that you were not in a relationship with God – than to misrepresent God to the world. But, though the command was to rest from their work, Sabbath rest is not a passive rest.

Actively engaged

In Exodus 31:16 God elaborates on the command by instructing the Israelites to observe the Sabbath throughout the generations. “Observe” is an active word. Keeping the Sabbath involves resting from your daily work while actively refocusing one’s mind, heart and soul on God. In this way, we are not only refocused and energized but we engage in activities that reveal God’s presence in the world around us.

Returning to the story in Mark, we read that the religious leaders have just reminded Jesus and his disciples of the gravity of their actions. It seems they have broken the Sabbath law and misrepresented God. And so the leaders challenge Jesus: “Why are your disciples openly and unashamedly breaking Sabbath law?” Jesus responds by reminding the leaders of their own history in which none other than David ate the bread of the Presence right off of the temple altar. Surely if it was acceptable for David not only to break the Sabbath law but to eat the bread meant for an offering, it was okay for Jesus’ disciples to eat a few cobs of corn! Then Jesus reminded the leaders that the Sabbath was made to serve humankind and not the other way around (Mark 2:27). Or, to use the words spoken to Moses, the Sabbath is “given in order that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you.” (Ex. 31:13). The Sabbath is a gift so that we can actively refocus our lives on God; human beings are not created to serve the Sabbath by insisting on any particular method for Sabbath-keeping.

Holy, active and reoriented

Throughout the history of the church Christians have understood Sabbath-keeping in several different ways. During the first few centuries, Christians decided that keeping the last day of the week as a day of holy rest was no longer necessary in light of Jesus’ rising from the grave on the first day of the week. Jesus’ resurrection signaled, among other things, the beginning of God’s New Age. Therefore Sunday (known as the Lord’s Day) became the church’s holy day. However, our reforming forefathers found it necessary to combine elements of Sabbath with their Lord’s Day practices. This is why the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1641 describes the Christian Sabbath as a day to “keep holy unto the Lord, when men, [sic] after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs before-hand, do not only observe a holy rest all the day from their own works, words and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the publick [sic] and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy” (Westminster Confession of Faith. VIII).

By combining the day of holy rest with the day of worship and duties of mercy (note that this direction requires action, not passivity) the church stands as God’s counter-cultural representatives. When the rest of the world goes on with its business the church stops, turns its attention to God and remembers that God-in-Christ is the source of life and hope. On the Lord’s Day we take a Sabbath rest, but we do so to actively reorient our lives to God’s mission in Christ.

Do our activities on Sunday remind us of God’s call on our lives? Do they serve as sign posts that point the world around us to God’s grace revealed in the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of our Lord Jesus the Christ? Or do they simply serve as a temporary distraction or an opportunity to take some time off?

Keeping the Sabbath holy – keeping the Lord’s Day holy – is not a passive pursuit. It is resting from our weekly tasks in order to actively remember God’s goodness through Jesus’ resurrection. It is actively refocusing our hearts, souls and minds on our Lord. It is engaging in activities that remind us that we serve the One who rose from the grave, the One who has begun the new creation in our present reality, the One who reigns over the church and will reign over the perfected world. Keeping Sabbath rest is a call to actively reorient our lives to God and thereby represent God-in-Christ to the world around us.

Ian Marnoch is a third year M.Div. student at Knox Presbyterian College. Upon graduation he plans on seeking a call as a pastor in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.
Uncomfortable

“Oatmeal.”

“Okay, great!”

Ten minutes of oatmeal-making later, just as I add the last raisins to her bowl, she looks up and says, “Oatmeal? I don’t want oatmeal. I only want waffles.”

“No, I SAID waffles! I only love waffles. Oatmeal is yucky.”

We try not to give in. Let anything slide with your three-year-old, and watch out. She’ll snift you out like a hound on the sandbank. With your three-year-old, and watch out. We try not to give in. Let anything slide with your three-year-old, and watch out. She’ll snift you out like a hound on the sandbank. The theology in the world couldn’t help me over that hump.

Paul hints at the importance of this heart/mind connection with a paradox in Ephesians: “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power... to know this love that surpasses knowledge” (3:17-19). He wants the people of God to know the unknowable, to enter the grand, impossible mystery of God’s love. It is a knowing that goes far past knowing; it is a knowing that engages the depths of us, our souls.

And that is how it goes. Somewhere, somehow, along the line, I began to sense joy in the eyes of God as they looked at me. I began to believe that my heart, my behaviour, was God’s chief concern and desire.

What if the Church was packed with Christians who believed, in their very deepest selves, that God looked at them with tender love and intense joy, the way we look at our beloved children? What if every person in every pew was whole with the love that surpasses knowledge? No truth proposition can have any real effect on us if we doubt our heavenly Father’s complete acceptance right now, in this sinful moment, without any effort on our part to make ourselves better.

This is where Christianity belongs to a toddler – because its core of power is found in our falling and our tantrums. In my daughter, I hear my own raw cry for love. God answers my heart’s deepest question as I answer hers: “Yes, precious girl, I love you even now when you’re screaming and throwing things and willfully disobeying me. You don’t have to be a good girl for me to love you. I love you no matter what.”

Uncomfortable

In her classic book, Living Confidently in God’s Love, Hannah Whitall Smith tells about a conversation she once had with an atheist. He said to her, “The Christians I meet seem to be the most unintelligent atheist.”

“Clare, what would you like for breakfast?”

“Oatmeal.”

Okay, great!”

Ten minutes of oatmeal-making later, just as I add the last raisins to her bowl, she looks up and says, “Oatmeal? I don’t want oatmeal. I only want waffles.”

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So here is a post which I have entitled “Road rage and the Ten Commandments.” But I have geared it towards car ownership/driving in general.

1. You shall have no other gods before me. Do you worship your car? Do you need your car more than you need God? Do you get more upset when your car gets dinged than when the Lord’s name is taken in vain?

2. Is your car an idol to you? Do you spend more time and energy on “soaping up” or cleaning and waxing your car than you do reading the Bible or praying?

3. Have you ever blasphemed the name of God while driving? Do you have episodes of road rage while driving a car sporting a “Know Jesus, Know Peace, no Jesus, no peace” bumper sticker? Do you curse while in your vehicle? Does your car sport bumper stickers that are false to your beliefs, like the popular “Jesus Saves” sticker?

4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Do you ever have road rage on the way to or from church? Do you take overly long trips, skipping church to drive for ten hours on a Sunday?

5. Honour your father and mother. Obey those in authority over you. Do you obey the traffic laws of the land? Or do you think they don’t apply to you? Do you speed? Do you pass on the right? Do you tailgate? Do you talk on your cell phone or text or change the music on your iPod while driving? Do you toss cigarette butts or other garbage out of your car window?

Points 6-10 and other postings are available at onechristiantdad.wordpress.com. Ryan Smith lives in Chilliwack, B.C., with his wife and three children and attends Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church. This blog was originally posted in October 2012.
When my mother and I get pedicures she always talks to the woman who paints her toes. This drives me crazy. I tip generously, but for me part of the beauty of a pedicure is in the anonymity of the service. My mother, though, is right. I think her approach to relationships holds a key to one part of the struggle against human trafficking. It is in relationship that trust is built, and only in a trusting relationship will victims of human trafficking come forward.

Human trafficking is the smuggling, trading or exploitation of people for the use of their labour or their bodies. The most recent numbers suggest that 17,000 people are trafficked into the United States every year, and the RCMP estimates that between 600 and 2,000 people are trafficked into Canada annually. These numbers are worrisome, but they are relatively small given the size of our populations. The bigger problem is that within our countries the labour of both residents and citizens can be exploited. And many recent studies demonstrate that this problem hits closer to home than we’d like to admit. The beauty industry, for example, exploits the labour of young women in ways that can parallel slavery.

In May 2015, Sarah Maslin Nir of the New York Times wrote a shocking expose of the illegal and dangerous conditions suffered by manicurists in New York City. The articles describe terrible working conditions that manicurists face, often because the workers do not have a way to enforce their rights. Some do not speak English; some do not have legal papers to work, and many owe large sums of money to the people who trafficked them into or around the country. Often workers are not paid a fair wage – sometimes only a few dollars for a full day of work. And long term health consequences occur when manicurists don’t have masks, gloves or a ventilated work area for safety.

Taking action

Christians are justifiably outraged by the crime of human trafficking, and we usually support legislation focused on detecting and supporting the victims of what is often referred to as modern day slavery. But it is also important for us to recognize that government and even the work of non-profits can be only one part of the solution. Every one of us, in our own everyday lives, must work to take responsibility for those who are victimized.

First, we have to admit that these things can happen right in front of us, in our own towns. Last year in my city of Spokane the owner of a nail salon was arrested for pimping young women from his suburban home. In the first reported Spokane County human trafficking sting, women were found locked up in a seemingly abandoned shack that I have driven by many times. So many of us were shocked, but had we been more attentive I wonder what we might have seen.

Second, if we’re not part of the service industry ourselves, we have to be the kind of people who know and build relationships with those who cut our hair, paint our nails, service our cars or clean the tables at our favorite restaurants. Be alert for the following conditions, which indicate a potential trafficking situation: if a worker lives with an employer; if an employer prevents you from speaking with a worker or if the worker seems to be scripted or rehearsed in conversation. As we build relationships we can ask questions like these:

• Have you ever tried a different job? Could you if you wanted to?
• How did you decide on this sort of job?
• Are you in debt to your employer?
• Can you come and go if you please?

If answers seem worrisome, make a call. Every Canadian province has an office with toll free numbers where reports can be filed. In British Columbia, for example, the Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons number is 1-888-712-7974. In the U.S., the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7888 gives a lot of helpful information related to law enforcement and other professional assistance.

It is scary to think that we can perpetuate the pain or abuse of another simply by getting a pedicure or making use of other inexpensive services. Getting to know the vulnerable people in our towns is a first step toward taking responsibility.

Julia Stronks has practiced law and is the Edward B. Lindaman Chair at Whitworth University, affiliated with the Presbyterian Church USA. She lives in Spokane, Wash.
Does math have anything to do with faith? This past May an international gathering of Christian mathematicians and computer scientists met at Redeemer University College to discuss the connections between their faith and their discipline. The biennial conference of the Association of Christians in the Mathematical Sciences (ACMS) attracted faculty from many Christian colleges as well as Christian faculty from various public universities. This was the first time the conference was hosted outside the United States, and it was an honour to host over 100 colleagues representing a wide variety of Christian traditions and institutions from across North America.

The ACMS began informally in 1975 when Robert Brabenec, a professor from Wheaton College, sent letters to several mathematicians in Christian colleges probing for interest in faith and mathematics. The feedback he received was positive and so several early conferences were organized at Wheaton College. The organization steadily grew, a formal board was established, and in the 1980s the relatively new discipline of computer science was added. The purposes of the ACMS were eventually formalized to encourage research and writing on the relationship of faith to the mathematical sciences, to promote interaction among Christians in these disciplines and to encourage innovative and effective teaching.

Distinct approach
Some may question the premise of ACMS’s purpose: does math have anything to do with faith? Doesn’t 1+1=2 for everyone, regardless of beliefs? Some conference attendees joked about the skeptical questions at the border after hearing “conference of Christian mathematicians.”

By common grace all people can explore mathematics, but faith commitments lead to many distinct attitudes and interpretations. Members of the ACMS have challenged the idea of the neutrality of mathematics by writing on topics such as truth and proofs, the notion of infinity, beauty in mathematics, God and chance and the effectiveness of mathematics to model the physical world. Several important philosophical questions naturally arise: for instance, is mathematics part of created reality or is it a human construction? Some have argued for a Platonic view of mathematics, that it somehow transcends creation, being something to which God himself is subject, or is a part of his divine nature. Christians have disagreed on this topic, but a Reformational approach to mathematics identifies number and space as being aspects of creation and that God is entirely above his creation.

The most recent conference featured two keynote speakers. Annelisa Crannell, a mathematician from Franklin & Marshall College, spoke about connections between geometry and art. The second keynote speaker was Matthew Dickerson, a computer scientist from Middlebury College, who spoke about whether computers could reason and the implications of seeing minds as machines. Various papers were also presented ranging in topics from big data to infinity and beyond.

No choice steaks from a cow
For years now I have been pointing out in my articles and columns that choice steaks do not come from cows. It seems that when folks see a large stocky type of animal – whether it’s a steer, heifer or cow – it is referred to as a “cow.” Why can’t they tell the difference?

“Great looking steaks there,” says the visitor to my farm as he points to a group of big cows ready to give birth in a month or so.

“Do you butcher your own cows?” is also an annoying question. “No, never,” I reply. “Only a young steer or heifer that’s been grain-fed.”

Cull cows are ground into hamburger. A cow can only be a cow if she has had a calf. Cuts of meat such as T-bone, wing, rib, rib-eye, tenderloin, striploin and sirloin steaks are all tender cuts of meat – great for barbecuing or broiling. They come from fattened up steers or heifers: young stock.

Men and women have different ideas about what makes a steak great.

Meindert van der Galien has Red Angus and Charolais beef cattle on his Renfrew-area farm. He’s happy with the price paid for live cattle – the highest ever. It makes up for the many years cattle prices were too low.
Bryan Moyer Suderman: Creating within structure

Judith Farris

“Can young children be reverent? Can older people be silly?” Bryan Moyer Suderman posed these questions at Camp Kintail’s Speaker Series on May 5, 2015. His musical style combines both, even in the same song. Making space for both reverence and silliness reflects his view of God’s action in the world: “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy.”

Since January of 2001, Bryan has been active as a songwriter, musician and worship leader. Among his first audiences was his then-three-year-old son, to whom he sang, “God’s love is for everybody, everyone around the world. Me and you and all God’s children, from across the street to around the world.” He founded SmallTall Music with the mission “to build up the body of Christ by creating and sharing songs of faith for small and tall.” The songs are simple yet profound.

Singing in the present tense

At the Speaker Series event, one of Bryan’s opening songs was “On The Emmaus Road,” based on the account in Luke 24. Attendees and camp staff sang the chorus while a few volunteers acted out the parts of Jesus, Cleopas and the unnamed friend, now named for the volunteer actor, Jessie. Incorporating the names of the people in the room is characteristic of Bryan’s style. Of the biblical narrative, he believes, “this is our story that we continue to be part of.”

We sang together, “We’re walking, walking, walking, walking on the Emmaus road.” As in this song, Bryan intentionally sets most of his songs in the present tense, drawing attention to God’s present action in the world and prompting our active engagement with the stories of the Bible. He pointed to Deuteronomy, in which Moses retells the law before the people enter the promised land. Moses says, “The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our ancestors that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today” (5:2-3, NIV). This statement is not true in a literal sense – that generation had passed away – but Moses’ statement invites the present generation to take up the covenant with God anew. Bryan suggests that every generation since that time has had the same

Improvisation within structure

In his introduction to his songbook My Money Talks, Bryan says his songs are not artefacts to be preserved; he invites individuals and communities who use the resource to make the songs their own. He showed one way to do so when he invited the group of us gathered in MacDonald Lodge to create new verses to his song “When God’s in Charge.”

My table’s group, working with the rhythm of Bryan’s verses and the text Isaiah 11:6-9, came up with: “When God’s in charge, the weak ones lead the great. All this harmony on earth is cause to celebrate. When God’s in charge, the weak ones lead the great.” Another group, working with Isaiah 25:6-8, wrote, “When God’s in charge, the people will be one. We’ll banquet on the mountain, and out will come the sun. When God’s in charge, the people will be one.” With Bryan leading on guitar, we sang each other’s fresh new verses.

The freedom to create and keep creating has a theological significance to Bryan. The words of scripture, and the structures offered by folk music, make way for creative expression in the belief that, as Bryan sings in a nativity song, “Make Room.”

“There’s something here that God wants to do. You can be part of it, too.”

Judith Farris lives with her family in Sarnia, Ontario, but she loves to visit Camp Kintail, where she serves on the board, whenever she can!

Passing on the faith: Musician Brian Doerksen and father at men’s conference in B.C.

Monica deRegt

“Did you know God’s voice can sound like Bob Dylan?” asked Brian Doerksen, as the final notes of Dylan’s “Make you feel my love” died away.

When the rain is blowin’ in your face. And the whole world is on your case, I could offer you a warm embrace. To make you feel my love.

Doerksen, a popular singer-songwriter who is well known for many worship songs including “Come, Now is the Time to Worship,” and “Hallelujah (Your Love is Amazing),” was speaking to a crowd of over 70 men and boys at Gateway Community CRC in Abbotsford, B.C., gathered there for a men’s breakfast event on May 23, 2015, on the theme “Men of Integrity.”

As the main guest speaker, Doerksen, along with his band, the Shiyr Poets, led the group in worship and shared parts of his own testimony, speaking of those times that we all go through that we didn’t sign up for – times of darkness, times of losing the right words. Through his own difficult experiences Doerksen discovered peace and comfort in the Psalms, and entered a journey of singing through the Psalms, which he says took him places he didn’t always want to go.

“Sometimes we convince ourselves that sacrifices should be pure,” he stated, “that our praise should be perfect. But the Psalms contain anger and despair mixed in with thankfulness, and we can relate to that, because we are all human.”

From generation to generation

The breakfast event at Gateway was organized as part of an effort by pastoral staff to provide ministry to the men in their congregation through meaningful, inspirational fellowship time.

“It was encouraging to see so many fathers take their sons with them,” Marcel deRegt, Executive Pastor, said. “We had men and boys aged 8 up to 80, making it a truly intergenerational day.”

The organizers were thrilled when Doerksen, a local Abbotsford resident, initially agreed to come to the event. He and the Shiyr Poets (pronounced “sheer” – a Hebrew word for musical or lyrical) travel extensively and perform concerts across Canada and Europe.

“We had this weekend available and we were happy to make it happen,” said Doerksen, who also brought his own father, Harry Doerksen, onto the stage for a live interview as part of the presentation. The two men illustrated how faith is passed on to us from and through our fathers, and how that, in turn, shapes the kind of fathers that men become to their own children.

Doerksen asked his father to speak about three words: journey, doubt and faith. Through the interview, it was obvious that pure joy and assurance in faith comes through the act of surrendering everything to God. And while this is a hard lesson to learn, it is something we can pass on to the next generation.

As the morning concluded, everyone in the room stood to raise their voices to the words of “It is well with my soul,” the ageless hymn that continues to speak comfort, strength and conviction of faith to so many generations.
Anniversaries

<table>
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<th>Pieter Willems Tensen</th>
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<td>1942 June 25 – 2015 May 25</td>
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Peter died of Congestive Heart Failure at the Brantford General Hospital in his 73rd year.

Beloved husband, for 45 years, of Linda Morrison.

Loving father of Tim, Ben (Trisha Beal) & Jonathan (Kim Schaus), grandfather of Alexander & Zachary.

Brother of Marja Tensen (Vancouver), Jenny & Bill Kapteyn (Sarnia), Henry Tensen & Annette Dekker (Kitchener), Wim & Carol Tensen (LA), brother-in-law to John & Leny Braaksma (Forest), Ian & Laura Morrison (Niagara Falls), uncle to many nieces & nephews.


Cremation has taken place. A memorial service will be held at the Cedarview Evangelical Centre in Paris on June 6.

Correspondence address: Henry Tensen, 30 Sunset Place Kitchener ON N2H 4L3

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Obituaries

Aukje Elizabeth Tjeerdsm (nee Kloosterman)
January 1, 1924 – June 18, 2015

The Lord took home our beloved mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Beloved wife of the late John Tjeerdsm. Dear mother of Tjeerd and his wife Anne of Barrie, Eelke and his wife Jane of Phepslon, Alie and her husband George Stampel of Stayner, Peter and his wife Jane of Phepslon and Symen and Sandra.

Lovingly remembered by 14 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren and pre-deceased by grandson Peter and daughter-in-law Rose.

Sister of Trien Kooistra and pre-deceased by sisters Tjits v. d. Meer, Siets Oosenbrug, Yt Bergsma and brother Symen Kloosterman.

Passed away at Mill Creek Care Center, Barrie on Thursday, June 18, 2015.

The funeral service was held at the First Christian Reformed Church, 33 Shirley Ave., Barrie on Tuesday June 23.

As an expression of sympathy memorial donations to the Timothy Christian School or Charity of your choice would be appreciated.

Betty Kielstra (nee Schenk)

Suddenly and peacefully went to be with the Lord on Thursday, June 4th, 2015, at her late residence.

Born August 9, 1932, Andijk, Holland.

Beloved wife of the late Ceci Kielstra.

Dear mother of:

Henry & Margaret
Peter & Shannon

James & Sherry
Margaret

Cherished grandmother of 10 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren

Lovingly remembered by the Kielstra and Schen families and many friends.

She was a faithful and active member of First CRC in St. Thomas, where a celebration of life was held June 10, 2015.

Job Opportunities

Tollendale Village

A Christian Retirement Community

is seeking applications for a

CHAPLAIN

Your primary responsibility would be the day to day coordination and delivery of a pastoral care program including working one day per week in the adjacent Long Term Care facility.

Qualifications Required:

Masters of Divinity or equivalent

Ordination and denomination endorsement

Experience working in Seniors Ministry

Long Term Care setting experience

Salary will commensurate with experience.

As we are an Ecumenical Christian Retirement Community you should be comfortable relating to seniors from a variety of Christian backgrounds.

Please submit your resume with cover letter by July 31, 2015 to:

Mr. Drew Currie, General Manager
By email resumes@tollendalevillage.ca or Fax (705) 722-7359

No applications in person please.

We thank all who respond, however only those selected for an interview will be contacted.

Principal

In beautiful Ottawa, Redeemer Christian High School seeks a principal with a love for Jesus and a passion for Christian education. Aug 2016 start. www.rcs.on.ca. Email searchteam@rchs.on.ca.

Church Planter / Campus Ministry

Seeking full time Ministry Leader for a Church Plant with a special focus on Campus Ministry. The goal is to develop a new self-sustaining Christian community. Key roles will include developing relationships and nurturing spirituality, evangelizing and discipling new Christians, establishing a permanent presence in the community where people can regularly worship and hear God’s word, creating missional ministry opportunities and developing Christian leaders in service to Christ’s church.

The ministry will be located in Oshawa, Ontario near the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT).

For more information please contact us at SC.NOCO@Gmail.com.

Pastors

Hope Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Courtice – near Oshawa – Ontario, is looking for two pastors who will serve in a team ministry that will take our church into its next chapter. The pastors will succeed our current pastor when he retires.

We are a growing, diverse congregation committed to vibrant, contemporary worship. We are excited about pursuing ways to implement our mission to believe, belong, bless, and we’re eagerly anticipating what God has planned for the next phase of our development.

If you can see yourself as part of a team ministry in an ethnically diverse church in which nearly half the members are under the age of 25, we’d love to chat with you.

Contact our Succession Planning Committee at fs succession@gmail.com or call the committee’s chairperson, Stan Baker at 905-440-6583.
Maranatha Gardens
Aging In Place Christian Community.

Maranatha Gardens Investment Opportunity
Located on New Street in Burlington beside Maranatha Homes. Offering promissory notes at 4%.

For further information:
Hank Gelderman • 905-546-6736
hgelderman@gelderman.com
John Glasbergen • 905-639-3605
jglasbergen@sympatico.ca

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Amount based on sample of $20,000
Sample for joint life annuity (payable as long as either person is alive)
Male 75 & Female 75 5.59% $1,118 $4,889 $1,045 $73

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**Adult fiction continued from page 20**

**Kit’s Law** by Donna Morrissey is about 14-year-old Kit, her mentally challenged mother, Josie, and Lizzie, her grandmother. When Lizzie suddenly dies, leaving Kit and Josie to fend for themselves, they must fight to stay together as the Newfoundland town tries to put Josie in a mental institution and Kit into an orphanage, changing their lives in ways that neither of them expected.

– Hayley Vandergoot

**Ordinary Grace**, a mystery written by William Kent Krueger, takes place in 1961 in New Bremen, Minnesota. It is the story of a young boy, Frank Drum, who experiences death in many forms and is forced to come to terms with loss. It examines the ordinary blessings that occur daily even in the midst of hardships, as well as the strength and resilience of family.

– Samantha Forgie

**The Other Side of the Bridge** by Mary Lawson contains two intertwining stories of Arthur and young Ian set in Northern Ontario. I definitely recommend it for the way it deals with themes such as growing up, parent-child conflict, choices, guilt, jealousy and redemption, as well as for its well-developed characters and interesting plot.

– Jolene Lammers

**The Way We Fall**, the first in a trilogy by Megan Crewe, follows teenager Kaelyn whose home island is quarantined due to a deadly outbreak. The illness starts with an itch that just won’t go away and soon leaves you blabbing your darkest secrets to anyone who will listen, hallucinations and then: DEATH. In a world where white masks replace smiles and your best friend can become your enemy, will Kaelyn find the strength to survive?

– Jenna de Boer

**Erebos** by Ursula Poznanski is a fantastic book because of its intricate plot and amusing characters. Nick, a 16-year-old boy, is invited to play Erebos, a “secret online video game” that has everyone at school hooked. It opens up a whole new world of adventure but also raises moral questions for players. A fun read that will hook readers, *Erebos* is great for a day at the beach.

– Ian Smit

**A Spy in the House** is the first in The Agency Series by Y.S. Lee. The series focuses on a female spy agency in 19th Century England. If you like lots of adventure, harrowing plots and a hint of romance, you’ll want to take these books with you on vacation!

– Jesse deDreu
Great books for summer

We asked for your favourite books and got this wonderful, wide-ranging mix of literature and non-fiction in return. There’s a book for every kind of reader here!

Special thanks to Marlene Regnerus for inviting her Grade 12U English class to submit suggestions.

— Editor

Fiction

A Spool of Blue Thread by Anne Tyler. Tyler’s usual themes of family, home, belonging and disappearing all show up in this story of the Whitshank family. It’s easy to relate to Abby and Red, an aging couple, their concerned children and a family history of love, secrets and resentments. Central to this novel is the family home that Red’s father lovingly built. Tyler writes with compassion, humour and insight into human nature that connects the reader to the dynamics of family life.

— Joanne Spoelstra

All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr chronicles the tales of a young French blind girl and a clever German boy throughout the Second World War. As the war progresses from the initial takeover to the liberation of France, we see the two differing stories intertwine in a beautiful fashion, worthy of the Pulitzer Prize it has won.

— Jake VanderHeide

The Brothers K by David James Duncan is a deeply riveting and intriguing story of the Chance family as they pass through the turbulent waters of Papa Chance’s minor league baseball career and the upheavals of the Vietnam War. It is also a deeply religious novel about love and family, spiritual growth and the difference between church and religion (contains some explicit language and sexual content).

— David Westerveld

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