Canada’s general election, cannabis and the common good

Judith Farris

Canadians considering which candidates to support in the October 19 general election may be most swayed by “pocketbook issues,” defined by economist Patrick L. Anderson as “the impression voters have when considering their family budget and the national economy.” Christians may also consider the 2015 Election Bulletin produced by Citizens for Public Justice, which focuses on CPJ’s four priority issues: poverty in Canada, climate justice, refugees and democracy. This document focuses on the well-being of community, and it includes a reference to Alan Jones’ Reimagining Christianity. Jones comments, “How we arrange our common life is central to a healthy spirituality. Politics is simply the means we use to organize our shared lives. It is how we express responsible solidarity.”

Medical and recreational use of marijuana

A current issue of our common life in Canada is related to the recreational use of marijuana. It’s currently legal in Canada for medical purposes. Patients need a doctor’s prescription and must buy from licensed producers.

At issue in the general election is the recreational use of marijuana, an issue that clearly divides the three major political parties, though it is not a compelling pocketbook issue nor a top priority of the Election Bulletin. The Conservative Party has stated that it will not legalize marijuana, and possession of small amounts of the substance will remain a crime. Prime Minister Stephen Harper made an announcement on Tuesday, August 11 stating, “Unlike the other parties, we will not introduce misguided and reckless policies that would downplay, condone or normalize the use of illegal drugs.”

Thomas Mulcair, leader of the New Democrat Party, has proposed decriminalization, meaning that possessing small amounts of the drug would not result in criminal charges. The NDP plans to initiate research into all aspects of non-medicinal use of marijuana before deciding whether or not to legalize it the Freedom Road, to give them year round reliable access to the Trans Canada Highway.

In June 2015, the City of Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba agreed to each pay a third of the cost of building the 28km Freedom Road ($10 million each), but the Federal government refused and instead committed $1 million to a design study only. Chief Erwin Redsky and his family openly wept.

Residents use a ferry (when it’s working) and ice roads to get to the mainland, but it’s during the changeable spring and fall when the ice is too thin to drive on but

Steve Bell
calls on churches to support Shoal Lake 40

Lisa Hall-Wilson

In the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee findings, Juno Award-winning Christian recording artist Steve Bell is asking for churches across Canada to bring awareness to an issue that’s been overlooked for far too long.

Kekekiziibi, or Shoal Lake 40, is an Ojibway First Nations reserve near Kenora, Ontario. Shoal Lake 40 has supplied Winnipeg’s drinking water since 1916, but has been under a boil water advisory for 18 years. Shoal Lake 40 has been appealing to governments at every level to provide a road, they call it the Freedom Road, to give them year round reliable access to the Trans Canada Highway.

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Canada's general election continued

the drug for recreational use.

The Liberal Party has argued for legalization of marijuana for recreational purposes, to be sold to adults and taxed in a similar manner as alcohol and tobacco. In a statement issued on its web site last fall, the Liberal Party voiced its agreement with the Canadian Association for Mental Health’s position: “a well-regulated, legal system for marijuana access promotes public health and safety, reduces the harms associated with the use of marijuana, and helps to keep the drug out of the hands of our children – which is exactly what Liberals have been advocating.”

Vulnerable groups and the common good

This general election presents an opportunity to consider how marijuana is currently used in Canada and to set a course for the future. When considering what legislation to pursue, a question to ask is how the decisions made impact the common good, particularly on those who are most vulnerable. When it comes to marijuana use, some of the most susceptible groups include youth and people with an underlying tendency to paranoia and psychosis. Studies indicate that marijuana poses particular risks to the developing brain, especially with regard to intelligence and executive functioning. The effect is especially apparent with early and frequent use.

Contributing to the perception of relative safety is that people do not die of marijuana overdoses, as they do of alcohol poisoning or of opioids such as Fentanyl, which has caused 655 fatal overdoses between 2009 and 2014 in Canada, for an average of one person every three days (Health Canada, 2015). Proponents of marijuana legalization or criminalization is a better approach. In his comments on August 11, Stephen Harper stated, “Keeping dangerous and nonmedical marijuana is produced outside of the law, its quality and composition is determined by criminals.

Protecting children and youth

Protecting children and youth has been a main talking point in the debate over whether legalization or criminalization is a better approach. In his comments on August 11, Stephen Harper stated, “Keeping dangerous and destructive drugs away from our children isn’t a point of debate, it’s simply the right thing to do.”

Conservative Party attack ads have expressed a similar message. The party has plans to increase resources for the RCMP to target marijuana grow-ops and to set up a help line for parents with concerns about their children’s drug use, with a focus on helping parents to prevent problems.

The Downside of High

While it does not pose risks of overdose, marijuana still has its dangers. What distinguishes it from tobacco and alcohol is its potential to induce psychosis. David Suzuki’s documentary The Downside of High showcased research which indicates that “teenagers who start smoking marijuana before the age of 16 are four times more likely to become schizophrenic.” Marijuana can be a trigger for latent paranoid schizophrenics.

Contributing to the problem is the changed composition of many strands of cannabis. For a more powerful “high,” strands have been cultivated with higher levels of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive component and with relatively lower levels of cannabidiol (CBD), a component that has an anti-psychotic, calming effect. In combination, these two changes make today’s marijuana much stronger than what was commonly used in the 1960s. Exact levels of THC and CBD vary greatly depending on the variety of cannabis, and the fact that other substances may be mixed with the plant as well. Because nonmedical marijuana is produced outside of the law, its quality and composition is determined by criminals.

Stay informed

Not sure what to ask your MP? In addition to CPJ’s Election Bulletin cited on page 1, the Christian Reformed Church’s Office of Social Justice and the Centre for Public Dialogue have prepared excellent, complementary election resources; go to crcca.org/vote2015 for a summary and links. Key issues include refugees, physician-assisted death and indigenous education reform.

Turn to page 6 in this CC to find out how policy changes affect small farmers as well as those suffering in the human trafficking system.

And watch for an article from CPJ in our next issue, Sept. 28, outlining the ways each party plans to combat poverty in Canada.

Shoal Lake 40 continued

too thick for the ferry, when Shoal Lake 40 is completely isolated, that life gets even more difficult. People have died crossing the ice on foot to bring back food, bottled water and mail, or to seek medical attention – basic human rights.

The history

Shoal Lake 40 residents were relocated when the City of Winnipeg appropriated their land to build an aqueduct in 1914. The 140km aqueduct, completed in 1916, continues to supply Winnipeg’s water today.

Documents shared with Christian Courier by Shoal Lake 40, show that in 1914 the Indian Agent for Kenora wrote to Ottawa asking for clarification, on behalf of Shoal Lake 40 residents, on how much land would be needed for the aqueduct and what compensation would be offered.

Ottawa’s reply: “The Corporation of the city of Winnipeg has the power to expropriate the lands required, but you may assure the Indians that their rights will be safeguarded by the Department” (see image).

Why the boil water advisory?

When Shoal Lake residents were relocated to a nearby peninsula to make way for the aqueduct, crews cut out a channel to redirect contaminated water from nearby Falcon Lake away from the city aqueduct intake. Shoal Lake 40 was stuck on an island and the slow contamination of Shoal Lake began. A gravel dam keeps Winnipeg’s water clean and Shoal Lake 40 was left with the resulting mess.

The long-standing boil water advisory is one of the longest running advisories in existence, according to Health Canada. As of June 2016, the City of Winnipeg has not lifted the water advisory.

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Hedy Fry, the Liberal Party’s health critic, has argued that legalizing and regulating marijuana would protect children and young people by reducing their access to it. She claimed that currently, “The World Health Organization and UNICEF have both said that Canadian youth have the easiest access to marijuana of any the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] countries.”

The argument for legalization claims that legalizing and regulating the drug reduces the criminal element in the supply chain.

As we “organize our shared lives” anew in the fall election, how do we show “responsible solidarity” to others on this issue? Which course of action offers the healthiest possible future for children and youth? While this may not be a pocketbook issue, it is one that impacts our common life and the lives of vulnerable people.
Sixty churches across Canada have used their signs (or websites) this summer to show support for the Freedom Road. 30, 2015, there were 132 Drinking Water Advisories in effect in 91 First Nations communities across Canada, excluding British Columbia.

With no reliable year-round access to the mainland, Shoal Lake 40 is unable to build a water treatment facility, deal with sewage treatment, garbage disposal or build an economy.

Winnipeg resident Steve Bell heard about the Freedom Road in June 2015. “I don’t want to say I was outraged, but deeply saddened and shocked that we can be so inhumane to one another, especially in a country with so much wealth.”

In the weeks since, Bell’s “Churches For Freedom Road” campaign has gathered nearly 8,000 signatures in an online petition. Organizers are hoping for 10,000 signatures before delivering the petition to the House of Commons.

In addition to the petition, Bell and his team are asking churches to put “We Support Shoal Lake 40 Freedom Road” on their signs, take a photo, and send it to churchesforfreedomroad@gmail.com. The pictures will be used to create a collage that will be delivered to every MP in Ottawa.

On August 10, Conservative MP from Manitoba Joy Smith shared with the CBC that she had spoken with Greg Rickford, Natural Resources Minister, and that the federal government would fund Freedom Road.

Later that day, Smith said she had misspoken, that Rickford had not promised any new funding for construction of Freedom Road, and reiterated the $1 million pledge for a design study. Justin Trudeau has promised that, if elected, the Federal Liberal party will fund Freedom Road. Thomas Mulcair, leader of the Federal NDP, has made similar promises.

Amy Knight, Bell’s administrative assistant, brought the plight of Shoal Lake 40 to Bell’s attention and has been coordinating things behind the scenes. “So far we have signs from 55 churches from more than 10 denominations, so we are very pleased with this. Over the next month we aim to vastly expand the scope of support into other parts of Southern Manitoba, Western Ontario and the rest of Canada.”

Steve Bell gave an update on the initiative to CC via email from Winnipeg: “The support is coming from right across the country. . . . The Church is waking to the reality that redress and reconciliation is costly, yes, but joyful work as well.”

Bell offered a caution, however, for those who think that their voice, their support for this project, is no longer needed: “But let’s remember that support aside, nothing has yet changed on the ground for Shoal Lake 40. We must keep up polite but firm pressure until construction begins.”

Lisa Hall-Wilson is a freelance writer in London, Ont. For more information, visit churchesforfreedomroad.ca.

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What about the Christian community? Admittedly the response has been more muted than I would have liked. Readers following Facebook and other social media may have run across this quotation by a certain Sister Joan Chittister posted repeatedly in the wake of the release of the videos:

“I do not believe that just because you’re opposed to abortion, that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed. And why would I think that you don’t? Because you don’t want any tax money to go there. That’s not pro-life. That’s pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is.

To some extent this sentiment reflects the so-called “Seamless Garment” approach of the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin. The Seamless Garment, which Bernardin advocated in a 1983 speech, attempted to create a consistent ethic placing abortion within a larger web of life concerns, including capital punishment, warfare and poverty. As Bernardin put it, “The spectrum of life cuts across the issues of genetics, abortion, capital punishment, modern warfare and the care of the terminally ill.”

As a young man, I found Bernardin’s approach persuasive, and I thought it showed promise of breaking through the impasse between the two sides in the abortion debate. But this did not happen. In fact, since Bernardin’s death nearly 20 years ago and contrary to his good intentions, his consistent life ethic has been (ab)used more often to deprecate pro-lifers than to expand their apparently narrow horizons. Indeed, my impression is that Sister Joan’s remarks are disproportionately cited by pro-choicers to silence pro-life opinion.

But let’s put aside for the moment the polemical purposes behind these citations and examine the inner logic of the statement itself. Is it true that one cannot be pro-life if one is not equally concerned for every item on the increasingly extensive list with which detractors come up?

Serving the cause

Consider this hypothetical case: While visiting the city pool one summer day, a young man manages to save a child from drowning after she accidentally falls into the deep end. The young man is commended for his brave deed by virtually everyone, except for a single contrarian who publicly challenges his heroic status. Where was his concern for the depth of water in the pool beforehand? Why was he not concerned that the child be taught to swim before being allowed to go to the pool? Where was he when the possibly incompetent lifeguards were being hired? If he had no previous concern for these factors, then his ostensibly heroic deed was really nothing of the sort. Why? Because he is addressing only symptoms when he should have been attempting to rectify the underlying causes of the near mishap. Thus his heroism is fatally compromised, and he is little more than a hypocrite.

Sound familiar? Let us return then to the pro-life movement. For the moment we can put aside the fact that many pro-lifers are deeply involved in establishing and maintaining crisis pregnancy centres and other services to assist mothers and their children through difficult circumstances. We might even grant, if only for the sake of argument, the pro-choicers’ point that pro-lifers are not sufficiently attending to other legitimate issues, including those that might prompt a mother to end her pregnancy.

Nevertheless, if we recognize the propriety of a division of labour in which people with limited energy and resources try to do some good while other people seek other goods, then those working to avert and perhaps eventually to end abortion are still serving the cause of life and of justice. We might legitimately question their strategies, their methods and their timing, but in most cases the charge of hypocrisy simply will not stand up.
Ghostwritten

Angela Reitsma Bick

“Mother called: ‘I can’t talk. I’m surrounded by handsome men.’ Emergency surgery. If you can hold a thought for her now . . .”

Those lines were posted on Twitter by Scott Simon when he first learned that his 84-year-old mother had been hospitalized mid-July, 2013. Over a million people read his words, and Simon’s audience only grew as the National Public Radio broadcaster continued to tweet brief and poignant updates on his mother’s deteriorating health.

“My mother knows the name & story of every nurse & doctor in the ICU. She keeps no one a stranger.”

“Mother & I just finished a duet of ‘We’ll Meet Again.’ Every word has meaning. Nurse looks in, asks, ‘Do you take requests?’”

At the local library, I often drift toward the New Arrivals shelf. That’s where I picked up Simon’s new book, Unforgettable: A Son, A Mother and the Lessons of a Lifetime. It includes all his remarkable tweets and fills in the backstory. Halfway through his childhood, certain plot points felt familiar. And I realized that I’ve been reading a lot of autobiographies lately – Hard Choices; Count Me In; Something Other Than God; Dot Complicated; I Am Malala; Yes Please.

Chances are, your summer reading included a few memoirs too. Right now five out of 10 books on the Globe and Mail bestsellers’ list are autobiographies. They have titles like Finding Me; It’s a Long Story and A Work in Progress. I was at a writers’ conference where someone in his mid-30s had just published a third memoir. Many contemporary blogs take a confessional tone; I skim-read one after another, grasping text like a stone skips over water. And wonder at our appetite for navel-gazing. We seem to be obsessed with documenting ourselves – noting down each of the milestones that make up a life. Is this trend egocentric? Self-seeking? What does a memoir set out to accomplish?

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Simon’s succinct summaries are a good place to start. He found inspiration and courage in his mother’s deathbed life. He borrowed freely from her accumulated wisdom. And by publicizing her last weeks, he created a community of people helping each other cope with grief.

Yet Unforgettable fell flat for me. Simon’s a brilliant writer, and his Twitter account – almost a diary – from that summer is heart-rending. But the universal grief he tapped into had no solace besides being ubiquitous. In his final post after her death, he was left citing Shakespeare.

“She will make the face of heaven shine so fine that all the world will be in love with night.”

Juliet’s homage to Romeo in Act III, ages before the real tragedy occurs.

Beyond ourselves

Can words deliver meaning? Can anything, other than the “living and active” Word of God (Heb. 4:12)? In navel-gazing season, we need the book of Ecclesiastes to “call a halt to our various and futile attempts to make something of our lives,” as Eugene Peterson describes it, “so that we can give our full attention to God – who God is and what he does to make something of us.” That’s the dividing line between a biography that begins and ends with self (and there are a lot of them) vs. a personal story aware of its place, and placement, in God’s story.

This issue of CC has several uplifting examples of what God is doing to make something of us. And in that context, biographies are a wonderful thing. Meet the Olympic athlete who ministered to others in a WWII Japanese internment camp. A structural engineer who finds biblical inspiration in a man-made reservoir. And a parent who sees young children as uniquely designed to cultivate patience, that elusive fruit of the spirit. Ghostwriters for God? Not exactly. Maybe more accurate to imagine our lives as ghostwritten.

“Why, then, do I set before You an ordered account of so many things?” So queried St. Augustine of Hippo, in his Confessions, 398 A.D.

“It’s certainly not through me that You know them. But I’m stirring up love for You in myself and in those who read this, so that we may all say, great is the Lord and highly worthy to be praised.

“I tell my story for love of Your love.”

Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of Christian Courier and lives with her family in Newcastle, Ontario.

Minimalism: the latest path to happiness

Marie Versteeg

I can’t stand clutter. I like to have a place for everything. With three little kids, I rarely have everything in its place, but it’s still on my daily to-do list. I am seasonally overcome by the urge to purge. I tend to get a bit of ribbing from my loved ones about my need for orderliness. A couple years ago my mother, not really much of a gag-gift giver, bought me a table book on minimalist design after a weekend visit during which I spruced up her bathroom and helpfully suggested some hiding places for items she usually leaves out on the kitchen counter. Message received, Mom.

But lately I’ve begun to wonder whether my obsessions with our possessions has less to do with personality quirks and more to do with cultural angst.

And I don’t think I’m alone.

We all know we live in an era of overconsumption. Every day, newscasts warn us about the environmental, economic, mental and even spiritual consequences of our over-consumption. And at almost the same rate, advertisers encourage us to buy more things that are supposed to be solutions to those very same problems. We live in a fraught culture, to say the least, and we’ve begun to catch on.

But a growing number of people have chosen to reject possessions as an antidote to the problems our culture is facing. Environmental concerns, crumbling debt loads, unstable economic systems, increased awareness of global social injustice and the stresses of an ever more complex world all feed into the growing trend of living minimally.

What the movement looks like

Minimalism is a relatively newly branded branch of a wider movement toward simple living, and it advocates reducing your possessions in order to free up time and resources for other interests, such as health, family, spirituality or community involvement – whatever it is that you wish you were doing instead of cleaning out your garage on a holiday Monday.

Much of the focus of minimalism as a lifestyle choice is on reducing material possessions to the essential – items that either bring you joy or meet a specific need. The movement includes extreme challenges, like whittling your personal possessions to 100 items or reducing your wardrobe down to 33 pieces. These inspiring (maybe just to me) goals are intended as guidelines; minimalism will look different for each person.

Indeed, online leaders of the movement range from Joshua Becker, living in a suburban home with his wife and two children and working a full-time job, to Colin Wright, living out of a backpack and moving to a new country every few months. But regardless of their situation, every minimalist guru offers the same promise: freedom and happiness.

Clutter (both material and mental) is removed in order to free up time for the things that truly matter in life, whatever that may mean for the practicing individual. As Becker explains about his family’s journey, “We discovered more money, more time, more energy, more freedom, less stress and more opportunity to pursue our greatest passions: faith, family, friends.” Sounds pretty mighty, right?

Minimalists will also point to a long tradition of simple living, ideals that have cropped up in myriad religious and philosophical movements, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Epicureanism and our own Judeo-Christian tradition. Indeed,
Minimalism continued

history tells a pendulous tale of cultural excess and reactionary simplicity. Today’s minimalist trend, however, seems to have a slightly different focus than those that have come before: in many ways, minimalism is just another means of demonstrating coolness. Check out the photo gallery on Colin Wright’s blog, “Exile Lifestyle,” to see what I mean.

Still stylish

Simplicity, for many minimalists, does not necessarily mean abandoning style. People are choosing to have less, but they still can be pretty snobby about the few things they do have. Having less—by choice rather than by poverty—is subtly packaged as a morally superior and enviable “lifestyle.” I think this is why the cherry-picked references to Christian thinkers and traditions that you will find in a lot of minimalist literature are a little grating.

Minimalism is promoted as a means to an end: life fulfillment—which may include more time for spiritual growth and societal contribution. Religious orders that eschew material possessions, from ancient monastic traditions to today’s Amish communities, do so as a response to an already existing fulfillment—salvation in Christ. Living a simple lifestyle is not a means toward achieving personal happiness, but a choice to serve, born out of gratitude to a Christ who commands us to “Sell your possessions and give to the poor.”

I’m certainly not there. I drop off our excess toys and clothes at Salvation Army, but we’ve still got plenty more. My motivation for doing this is still selfish—I hate cleaning up mountains of toys each night, and I hate wrestling to cram clothes into already-stuffed closets. Having so much stuff doesn’t make me happy. But not having it likely won’t truly make me happy, either, if it’s only happiness that I’m seeking.

Cling loosely to your certainty

There was a time when I would have unrestrainedly applauded Ben deRegt’s strong effort to champion the standing position of his church and mine on homosexuality (An open letter to my gay brothers and sisters, August 10, 2015). A part of me still wants to suppress my rising reservations about that position, often encapsulated in the phase, “Love the sinner; hate the sin.”

Those reservations revolve, in part, around the spectacular failure of that position to convince very many of our non-heterosexual sisters, brothers, children and grandchildren that we really do love them, while the message that we hate their sin comes through overwhelmingly. deRegt’s concluding question is momentous: “Can we celebrate together?” His answer is that we can if and when they straighten out their behaviour. That position has borne a little bit of fruit: alienation of far too many of God’s LBGT children from his family, and easy self-righteousness among God’s straight children.

We’ll be struggling with this pain for a long time. Some of us know with certainty what the conclusion should be. Others of us would ask that we all hold our certainty a little more loosely while we all listen together to God and experience his grace in our messed up sexuality.

Syl Gerritsma
St. Catharines, Ont.

Not a hotel for saints

Re: An open letter to my gay brothers and sisters (August 10, 2015).

The gay persons I know, for a life time, do not deserve to be equated with cheating husbands and pornography enthusiasts. Such sins result, mostly, from wilful choices. The gay persons I know have no choice. Their sexual orientation is as fixed as their blond hair and blue eyes. Also, gay persons have love for each other that in quality and quantity is no different from that of heterosexuals, at their best.

And why the leaps in logic? For example, that Jesus gives no thought to homosexualuity is proof that he condemns it. Really? Or, this one, since nearly every Christian for the past 2,000 years has considered homosexuality sinful, it is. On such reasoning we need to toss out women voting in church, birth control, marriage after divorce, children at the Lord’s Supper, baptism of adopted children, women in office etc.

It is my experience that those who actually live in close contact with gay persons are the least judgmental and use words with great care. Homosexuality is not the same as perversion. Committed, monogamous relationships should not be equated with promiscuous behaviour. There is far more to gay persons than their sexual expressions. And especially this: all of us are failures. The church is not a hotel for saints but a hospital for sinners. Membership does not depend on first cleaning up your act.

Nick Loenen
Richmond, B.C.
Human trafficking, support for small farmers highlighted in CRC election resource

Danielle Rowaan

Mercy Edson has voters and policy makers to thank, in part, for helping her to start a small business in her village. As a rural woman in Mozambique with a small plot of land, Mercy’s opportunities to increase her profits and save money were limited, but then she met Sofia, a field officer from a World Renew partner, supported in part by Canadian government programs. Sofia helped women in Mercy’s village of Lidiwo start a small savings group which gave each woman the chance to borrow from the group savings on a rotating basis. When Mercy’s turn came, she purchased improved seed and fertilizers that unlocked the potential of her small plot of land and gave her better yields. Then the potential of the system really took off – Mercy could save even more money with the savings group, and was eventually able to save $167, which allowed her to purchase two cows and an ox-cart for transportation. The fruits of this work continue to multiply – she now shares manure from the cows with other community members, supports her children in school, tithes to the church and purchases necessities like salt and soap, which had been difficult to access without a dependable cash income. The sometimes unpopular work of making policy and voting was part of the puzzle that unlocked these opportunities for Mercy.

Countering demand for sex

New laws can result in big changes – if they’re consistently implemented. Purchasing sex, for example, is now criminalized in Canada but it is still happening. We have the opportunity to take preventative measures to stop commercial sexual exploitation by addressing the demand which drives the sex trade.

Jennifer Lucking has long grappled with the questions: “Is prostitution inherently oppressive to the women involved? Do some women choose this life, and is it really a free choice?” Recently finishing her master’s research on sex trafficking in Canada and working for the RCA as their Coordinator for Human Trafficking Outreach, she has been convicted by the stories of women and girls who have survived the sex trade that the demand for paid sex must be countered.

“I’ve really taken my cue from survivors of sex trafficking, who tell me that the majority of men who bought their bodies did not want the best for them, only gratification,” says Jennifer. It is perhaps telling that stating that tendency seems unnecessary or self-evident. “I see it as a scale,” she says, “from trafficked women and girls on one end, who have no choice and are absolutely oppressed to women who are forced into prostitution through circumstance to women who “choose” a life of prostitution on the other end. I think the women who truly choose prostitution are very much in the minority and therefore laws should tend to protect those who are both the majority and have the least power over their circumstances, on the other end of the scale.”

It’s an explosive mixture. Demand comes from (mostly) men with “a need for power and control” (says Jennifer), who interact with women and girls who in many cases have ended up in the sex trade through negative circumstances (poverty, trauma, abuse) or coercion (sex trafficking, pimping). The power balance is far too often skewed toward the “customer.” The story of Sherry, a friend of Tina Marlane, a Canadian advocate against human trafficking, is illustrative: Sherry was pimped out from a very young age, and her story and many like it in Canada fuel the work of people like Tina and Jennifer.

Christian actor refuses to ‘glamorize darkness,’ brings faith to work

HOLLYWOOD, California (BCN) – David Oyelowo is a talented actor. His recent starring roles in Selma, Nightingale and Lee Daniels’ The Butler have all won him awards and critical recognition. But for his most recent film, Captive, he’s had to tackle a unique challenge: avoid looking cool.

In the new faith-based drama Captive, Oyelowo plays escaped murderer Brian Nichols. The movie is based on a true story. In 2005, Nichols killed four people in his escape from an Atlanta courtroom; he also stole cars and kidnapped a young woman, Ashley Smith, before he was brought to justice.

Oyelowo says it was surprisingly difficult to prevent viewers from seeing Nichols as the film’s hero. “We had to work very hard to make sure that Brian Nichols didn’t come off as a cool kind of James Bond-like character.”

Oyelowo is a devout Christian. He explains that he believes he has a moral obligation to both God and his children to uphold godly principles both on and off the screen. That doesn’t mean he will never show darkness in his films. Rather, it means the light must always defeat the darkness; he refuses to glamorize sin.

“My worldview is very much borne out of my faith, so therefore I am an artist who believes that what I put out into the world has an effect, and therefore I have to be responsible for that,” he says.

When asked what motivates him to excel, Oyelowo referenced the Bible: “Anyone who knows the parable of the talents knows that that parable in the Bible illustrates being given gifts that God wants you to invest in and multiply. And I take that very seriously. That’s it, basically. I work very, very hard at something I love doing.”

Godly principles matter on and off the screen, Oyelowo says.

A question for your MP: How will you address this demand, rather than punishing the victims of commercial sexual exploitation?

Voting for the common good

These issues and others are the focus of new election resources from several ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. The Vote 2015 page (crcna.org/Vote2015) provides food for thought around five key issues, each presented using shareable panels of infographics that give basic background to an issue, “human face” stories that keep the issue real for voters and “talk of the town” talking points for when you dialogue with your MP candidates.

When we vote for common good, elections are about considering the stories of our neighbours, like Mercy and Sherry, and how policy changes will affect not just our wallets, but also their chances to flourish. “Pursuing passionate citizenship,” as the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue understands it, means seeking to vote as a way to love our neighbours, and therefore, as part of discipleship. The temptation to cynicism and apathy is real, but what if we considered democracy as a gift, though an often broken one, which is ours to steward for the common good?

Danielle Rowaan is the Justice Communications and Education Coordinator with the CRC’s Centre for Public Dialogue.
FORT WORTH, Texas (CNA/ EWTNNews) -- According to Christian sociologist and social historian Rodney Stark, the number of Christians in China is growing at an impressive annual rate of seven percent.

Stark, who is the co-director of the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, is the co-author, with Xiuhua Wang, of A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China.

Stark and Wang estimate that in 1980 there were 10 million Christians in the People’s Republic of China, and that in 2007 the figure was 60 million. These numbers yield a growth rate of seven percent a year, which means that last year there were nearly 100 million Christians in China. Stark and Wang say that this large increase is driven by the conversion of the better educated, who are experiencing “cultural incongruity” between traditional Asian culture and industrial-technological modernity, which results in a spiritual deprivation, which Christianity is able to answer. China’s intellectuals, Stark says, “are very convinced they’ve got to turn West to understand the world they live in ... and they’re convinced by my argument that Eastern religions don’t fit the modern world they’re engaged in, and that they need to look to the West to find philosophies and religions. It’s quite amazing.”

Looking backward

Eastern religions, like Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, Stark maintained, “are all anti-press; they all proclaim the world is going downhill from a glorious past, and that we should look backwards, not forwards. None of them admit that we’re able to understand anything about the universe – it’s something we have to meditate on, not something to try and theorize about, as the physicists and chemists do. And that doesn’t fit with the world that modern Chinese are experiencing having happened around them. Industrial society, and all the science it’s based on, doesn’t fit well with those kind of religious views.”

Stark continued, “But the question of what does the world mean, and how do we live in it, persists – and so that’s a major motor in the Christianization of China, and it explains why it’s the most educated Chinese who are the most apt to join.”

The spread of Christianity in China, he said, has been possible even “during the worst time of Chinese persecution” under Mao Zedong’s cultural revolution of the 1960s and ’70s because “this process of conversion is invisible, the government can’t see it.”

According to Stark, religious conversion occurs primarily through social networks, and so is “invisible” to government officials. He holds that Chinese living in rural areas are more likely than city dwellers to be Christian, because their social ties are stronger, and thus Christianity can be transmitted there more easily. Revivalist tent meetings, he said, “are not really how it’s done. People join things in a much more intimate, a much quieter way.”

Christian missionaries have been in China since the 16th century. In the 20th century the communist government expelled foreign missionaries and later established government-sanctioned churches. These have existed in opposition to the “underground” Church, which is persecuted.

A communist oddity

Stark notes that “the Communist Party is fairly deeply involved in Christian growth, in ways that are not talked about – but out in the villages, many of the local communist leaders are very openly Christian, to the point of having crosses on their doors, their living room walls, which the government can’t see it.”

Stark called the conversions “invisible,” is hardly being discreet about it.”

“In the cities it’s more discreet, but still, in all there are enormous numbers of sons and daughters of communist officials who are now Christians, and you go to their elite university campuses, and it’s shocking, the Christian feel of the place, in a way that you don’t get in American, Christian colleges. You don’t get this feeling at Notre Dame, or at Texas Christian, that you get walking around the University of Peking.”

He noted that there are many Christian professors, and that Christianity is strongest at the universities – where the future members of the country’s Communist Party are studying. “This may be part of what’s going on behind the scenes,” Stark supposed: “that it’s becoming uncomfortable to push Christianity around.”

Stark then noted that this is not the case in one of China’s 34 provinces, still believing those beliefs are “invisible” to government officials.

Famous Olympian-missionary Eric Liddell honoured by China

TIANJIN, China (TCI) – Eric Liddell, the British Olympic champion who later became a missionary, and who was the subject of the popular film “Chariots of Fire” (1981), has been honoured for his commitment to the Chinese people. In a rare gesture of respect and admiration, a statue of the Christian athlete has been erected in the city of Tianjin. It was recently unveiled in a ceremony attended by Liddell’s daughters, as well as by the survivors of a Japanese-run civilian internment camp in Wei-fang, China, where Liddell was held during World War II. He died in 1945 of a brain tumor while imprisoned in the camp.

Liddell’s daughter Patricia told The Times of London that she was taken aback at the statue being erected. “I find it extraordinary that a statue has been raised. The Chinese don’t really raise statues.” She added, “My father was multifaceted. He didn’t just appeal to religious people. He was born in China, he worked in China, he died in China. He’s their Olympic hero. He didn’t leave the Chinese people when the going got tough.”

Liddell had been offered a ticket out by Winston Churchill but chose to give it to a pregnant woman instead. During his time in internment he helped smuggle in medical supplies and worked tirelessly to educate other internees.

An Olympic runner as a young man, Liddell famously (and unexpectedly, according to virtually all his critics) won a gold medal and set a new 400m record at the 1924 Paris Olympics. An evangelical-Presbyterian, he made headlines when he refused to run in the 100 meter race -- which he had trained for – because it was held on a Sunday.

A new film, effectively a sequel to “Chariots of Fire,” is currently being made, starring British actor Joseph Fiennes as Liddell. The film, called “The Last Race,” will focus on the latter half of Liddell’s life, when he had retired from sport and had moved back to China as a missionary.

At the unveiling of the statue, Fiennes spoke about Liddell. “It’s one thing to preach Bible study or whatever, but it’s another to actually live your beliefs under conditions like being in an internment camp. It’s not just preaching. It’s about watching someone in a set of beliefs in extraordinary circumstances, still believing those beliefs will carry him through.”

How do you feel about Donald Trump?

More on the subject of women: “You know, it really doesn’t matter what the media writes as long as you’ve got a young, and beautiful, piece of a**.”

Concerning reporter Megyn Kelly, who Trump thought was asking unfair questions: “You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes. Blood coming out of her wherever.”

As well as: “The point is, you can never be too greedy.”

Those are the facts about Donald Trump. And given those facts, you’re probably wondering why anyone would vote for him. His biggest claim to fame – that he’s a successful, self-made businessman – is just not true. He’s rude and offensive and demeaning towards women. He’s crude and crass.

And yet he could be President. Why?

For starters, people in the U.S. are slowly starting to figure out that sending all their manufacturing jobs to China was a bad move, and that working in Walmart selling Chinese-made goods to other people working in the retail sector is probably not a sustainable economic model. People are scared. And they should be.

In fact, it’s long overdue. Trump speaks to those fears when he says he’ll “deal with China” and be the “best jobs President ever.”

Sound familiar?

Canadians wondering how the Americans could choose Donald Trump to lead them only need to look as far as Rob Ford to find the answer. Like Trump, Ford made his political career out of saying and doing whatever he wanted. He came across as crude and vulgar – but also as someone who would stand up for the “little guy.” He promised that he’d cut wasteful spending and stick it to the elites in Toronto. It didn’t matter that Ford was rich himself, or that he never accomplished any of the goals he set out for himself: people stood up by him because of how he made them feel.

That word is important: “feel.” Because you’ll hear it a lot in political discussions. When confronted by the facts about a candidate like Ford or Trump, people will say “Yeah, I know he’s a jerk, but I feel he’ll be a good leader.”

In my experience, when the “F” word enters a political discussion, that’s a sign that the discussion’s over. Their hearts are made up, and no evidence in the world will change that.

But let me ask you a question: What do you think about that statement: “Thank you Lord Jesus for President Trump”? How do you think Jesus would speak to guy like a Donald Trump? Would he say: “Thanks so much for building that wall to keep the Mexicans out” or would he say “Way to put Megyn Kelly in her place”?

It’s a good question to think about. Because while the sign is wrong to call him “President Trump,” that day may come. If Rob Ford can be elected Mayor of Toronto, Donald Trump could certainly be elected President of the United States.

And how does that make you feel?

Lloyd Rang is Communications Director at the U of Toronto and a member of Rehoboth Chr. Ref. Church in Bowmanville, Ont.
Reclaiming the ‘Dark Ages’

Jonathan de Vries

We do not tend to think of something labelled “medieval” as being a good thing. Most of us were inculcated in elementary and high school with a conventional narrative of the period roughly covering A.D. 500-1500 as being a period of regression and stagnation, which only came to a welcome end when the revolutionary paradigm shifts of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment (and, depending on which school one attended, the Reformation) delivered civilization into the sunny uplands of reason, freedom, scientific knowledge and technological progress. This narrative was perhaps summarized most directly by William Manchester in his bestselling book *A World Lit Only by Fire,* in which he describes the Middle Ages as “a mélange of incessant warfare, corruption, lawlessness, obsession with strange myths and an almost impenetrable mindlessness.” There is little question that Christianity was the central defining institution of the Middle Ages, and its association with them has tended to loop it into all of the negative attributes of the period, a legacy that still resonates today whenever pejorative comments are uttered involving words like “inquisition” or “crusade.” The conventional view, again readily embodied by Manchester, is entirely negative: the Church’s greatest strength was its “total resistance to change.” Despite being mostly riddled with superstitions and rituals leftover from paganism, Christianity created a “ridged mindset which left no role for curiosity or innovation.” “Christianity,” quips Manchester “survived despite medieval Christians.” Yet the conventional view is wrong, or at least it is grossly incomplete and highly misleading. Modern Western Civilization, whether we wish to acknowledge it or not, is heavily in debt to the Middle Ages and, perhaps more controversially, to Christianity. To ignore this legacy is to not only be historically ignorant, but to weaken our own present-day values. This is the argument made by two recent books.

Johannes Fried’s *The Middle Ages* is a thick brick of a book. It’s perhaps not for the timid, but it certainly isn’t only for the specialist. Fried retells the story of the Middle Ages, not as a desultory period in European history but as the cultural and intellectual foundation of modern Western society itself. Middle Ages were, according to Fried, about the emergence of a “culture of reason.” Much of what we normally associate with the Enlightenment – rationality, knowledge-based approaches to the world, logical and systematic thinking, secularism and individualism – actually first emerged in the Early Middle Ages and were almost fully developed by the time the light lifted on the so-called “dark ages.”

At the heart of this culture of reason was Christianity and the Church. Clerics provided the intellectual elite of Europe, the innovators, reformers and the revolutionaries. Christianity itself supplied the driving force behind many ideas and institutions we identify as modern. Fried provides detailed examples, such as how Christianity’s emphasis on individual guilt led to the idea of criminal culpability being based on intentionality. In a related way, the emergence of canon law inside the Church directly inspired the growth of rational legal systems in the secular realm. Even Christian eschatology played a part: Fried shows how the idea of Christ’s imminent return was linked to the emergence of scientific thinking and methods, the impulse to explore, understand and push the boundaries of the known world. If the Kingdom work was to be finished by the end of days, the whole of Creation would need to be known and understood.

One specific link between Christian thinking and the modern world is elucidated by Larry Siedentop in *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism.* Siedentop’s focus is what may well be the defining idea of our present-day society: the individual as an autonomous, rational, moral agent. The conventional narrative gives us the “individual” as a product of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which in turn drew on the supposedly secular ideas of Classical Greece and Rome. Shoddy history, charges Siedentop. In truth, the Classical world was rigidly hierarchical. Founded on families, cults and political units, classical society did not recognize private will or choice. It was a world of fixed, differing status, where inequality was natural and human agency didn’t exist.

And then a new idea changed everything. The call that went forth from the Galilee to “follow me” was not directed to a particular class, country or ethnicity. It was directed to individuals. The idea of the Christian community – to be “one in Christ” – was a society of equality, not hierarchy. In short, Christianity laid the ontological foundations for the idea of autonomous individual. At first, it was the individual as a moral status: a person capable of knowing and choosing God on his or her own. Siedentop persuasively shows how over the centuries, this idea would expand to become the idea of the individual as a social and political role that is best known to us today. Again, it was in through the Middle Ages where this surprising, Christian idea worked out its consequences.

Neither Fried nor Siedentop seek to prove divine providence at work in the Middle Ages. Quite the contrary: the development of Fried’s “culture of reason” and Siedentop’s individual were opposed just as often as they were fostered by institutional Christianity, and both in turn did their fair share of damage to the belief system that fostered them. The egalitarian idea of Christian individuals would regularly compel reform in institutional Christianity, and when reform could not be achieved unity would be shattered. When the representative and democratic impulses of the 15th century conciliar movement foundered in the face of a hierarchical church dominated by the Papacy, the stage was set for priesthood of all believers to shatter the unity of Christianity in the 16th century. Not only Christianity as a community, but Christianity as the ultimate truth would come under attack by its ideological progeny. The drive for rational understanding, having been first used by clerics to build a rational understanding of God’s world and word, would later be turned against the very truths Christianity held dear.

Yet the neither Fried nor Siedentop see the Middle Ages or Christianity as something that was useful only as a handmaiden for the modern world. Quite the contrary. Fried notes that the Middle Ages has become a cheap excuse: too easily we decry failings in our present day world as being “medieval,” as if they can be wholly attributable to leftover barbarism we will shortly progress away from, instead of being caused by present day social-ills. What both decry is the mentality that history does not matter, that we can take our present day system of values and institutions as simply given and right, as immutable as physics or mathematics. Such complacency will be the undoing of those very values. If we don’t know why we believe in particular institutions, if we don’t know what their moral foundations were, we lose the ability to value, perpetuate and share those institutions. As Siedentop concludes: “If we in the West do not understand the moral depth of our own tradition, how can we hope to shape the conversation of mankind?”

A passion for art quilting
An interview with Jan Holleman

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Thirty-five years of quilting have enriched the personal, spiritual and communal life of Jan Holleman, from Cambridge Station, Nova Scotia. Now retired after being self-employed in family businesses for most of her life, Jan, 66, finds joy in having more time to quilt. Recently Christian Courier interviewed Jan to learn about her passion for art quilting and its impact on her church community, Kentville Christian Reformed Church.

CC: On your website (artquiltsbyjan.com), you mention that art quilting is your passion. What is art quilting?

Jan: Art quilting is a combination of many techniques. I started with the basics of quilting – cutting, pressing and setting block correctly – long before the term “art quilt” was coined. Art quilting is a broad term referring to contemporary textile art which has some or all of the basic structural characteristics of a traditional quilt, but incorporates a myriad of contemporary techniques and materials. Surface design, embellishment, hand stitching and machine stitching are often used to create art quilts. Materials range from fabric and fibers, such as paper, to other mixed media, such as beads, buttons and yarn.

Today, my art quilts are a combination of fabric, fusibles, confetti work, paint, oil sticks and embellishments. Then I very heavily machine quilt the whole piece to give it depth and motion. This is my favourite part of the process, as the quilting is like the icing on the cake. I can basically turn any photograph into an art quilt. It’s very creative and fulfilling. It’s also fun to do abstract designs.

When did you become aware of your passion for art quilting, and how have you developed it?

After many years of doing regular quilting, I started to feel closed in. I had ideas in my head, but didn’t know how to transfer them onto fabric. There was a lot of trial and error – and wasted fabric! But I learned new skills as I went along and each piece got better. There are great quilting publications on the market today and I’ve had subscriptions to most of them at one time or another. Also, attending national quilt shows and cruising the market today and I’ve had subscriptions to most of them at one time or another. Also, attending national quilt shows and cruising the web opened my eyes to more and more surface design, embellishment, hand stitching and machine stitching are often used to create art quilts. Materials range from fabric and fibers, such as paper, to other mixed media, such as beads, buttons and yarn.

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Jan Holleman finds inspiration for her art quilts from her beautiful surroundings in the province of Nova Scotia.

You’ve worked with Matth for more than 25 years. Tell us about your partnership and about the banners you’ve created.

Matth and his wife Willie moved to the Annapolis Valley about the same time my husband and I did. We became friends almost right away and our relationship naturally progressed from there. Our church had an in-house artist in Matth, and I had the quilting skills. It just seemed to go together. Matth had the ideas and could put them on paper, and I knew how to transfer his ideas onto fabric. We started with traditional felt banners, but I wasn’t impressed with how they hung. Why not use traditional quilting to make banners? Mind you, now I’m not impressed with some of the first quilted banners we made either, but, as the years went by, they got better and better. Matth is a wealth of images, ideas and design. We began by trying to have a banner for each season of the church year, and now we have more than we can possibly hang in a liturgical year. Matth draws the design and gives it to me. I make the pattern and the banner with input from Matth about colour choices – he is the best at that! I quilt it and then Matth finishes it by painting with oil sticks on the fabric. This gives a very in-depth look to the banners and highlights them wonderfully. It makes for a very warm worship environment.

Have your liturgical banners had an impact on your congregation?

Our congregation has been blessed by the banners. Some banners draw more reaction than others, of course, depending on people’s own spiritual walk. The banners help congregants to meditate. Different people see different things in them, whatever speaks to their souls. Matth always uses a lot of symbolism in his drawings. How people interpret this symbolism is truly an individual experience. Three people looking at the same drawing will see three different things. Visitors to the church always comment on the banners and are blessed by them. Of course, in the beginning, there was opposition because it was a very new thing to have colourful wall hangings in the worship space. But as the years progressed, they were appreciated more and more as people realized how they add to worship.

Do you have a favourite liturgical banner?

I really like the ones that are now permanently hanging in the church sanctuary. They cover the spectrum of the liturgical year: Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost and Ascension. The designs are
Growing as an artist is a lifelong journey. What have you learned along the way?

I’m not by nature a patient person. I like to grab the bull by the horns and get things done—and the faster, the better. I usually have 10 possibilities dancing around in my head at one time. But quilting has taught me to slow down, to be more precise in my work, and to take time to enjoy the process, rather than just pushing to the completion. It’s like living the journey without always thinking only of the destination.

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The difference a moment can make

Tom Baird

My mother died recently, the week before her 87th birthday, and I flew to Chicago to join my siblings in conducting her funeral service. At the ceremony my brother shared a story I had not heard before about how my mother had made a lasting impression on him through a wise and loving act at a critical moment in his life.

The story is a powerful testimony to the impact a mother can have on her children and, indeed, the impact each of us can have on others when we choose to love intentionally. But the story goes beyond this. It illustrates how, when we offer our small efforts to God, he graciously takes them up into something vastly greater than we could ever imagine. In these moments of faithfulness, God is allowing us to play a small but significant role in a drama he has been unfolding since the beginning of time.

My brother explained that as a young boy he went out to play with his friends as he would have on any ordinary day. On this day he had joined their company and had evidently been crowned the group’s new leader. When my late-comer brother sought to join the group, he inexplicably became the target of this new boy’s mean-spiritedness.

The boy promptly passed out a candy to each of the children present except my brother. Then he announced, “I want to play with all of you – except (pointing directly at my brother) for that boy.” Jim assumed his friends would rally to his defense, but the new boy had them in his thrall. No one stepped forward to help. My brother returned home dejected and overcome with emotion.

Redemption vs. revenge

At our kitchen table, through profuse tears, Jim shared the story with my mother. She listened patiently and spoke soothingly. Then she took out a bag of candy and said, “Jim, I want you to go out there and give one of these candies to each of those boys.” A picture instantly sprang to my brother’s mind of how he would get his revenge by giving candies to each of his friends, but not to his new enemy. Perhaps suspecting my brother’s designs, my mother continued: “And Jim, Jesus says we should turn the other cheek. I want you to give a candy to the boy who hurt you.”

My brother reluctantly returned to the group to hand out the treats. He went around the circle placing a candy in the hand of each of his friends and, when he came to the ringleader, he placed a candy in his hand too. The boy was visibly surprised, and apparently shaken by the gesture. He mumbled a few unintelligible words, turned and walked away. He was never seen in the neighbourhood again.

What happened to that boy, and how this act of forgiveness might have impacted his life, we do not know. We do know, however, that the experience significantly changed the life of my brother Jim. God used my mother’s wisdom, at a critical crossroad in his life, to help him choose a redemptive path rather than a destructive one. The story is impacting other lives, as well, as my brother continues to recount the episode even now, 50 years later.

Another dimension

As special as this story is when considered as a straightforward example of love and wisdom, there is another, more profound dimension to the story when it is seen within the context of my mother’s whole faith journey. You see, if you could ask my mother today, she would tell you that she was not actually a Christian at the time she counselled my brother in this way. While she was a church-going person (Catholic) and devout in her own way – she insisted we all go to church – she would tell you that she had not yet personally encountered Christ.

Her conversion occurred a decade later, and only after everyone in our family, including she, had abandoned church-going altogether. (It came during a “mini-revival” that swept through our family and saw eight out of nine family members come to faith within just a few years of one another, and then go on to join various evangelical churches all over Mexico and the U.S. where we had been scattered.)

So while my brother’s story, on one level, is about how God used a woman, who was being faithful to what she knew, to touch the life of her young son, the larger story is that God was using a woman who knew him only by reputation to touch the life of a young boy in anticipation of a day when both mother and son would come to know him as the living Saviour.

Small but significant

Viewed in this way, the story describes how my mother’s action was a tiny link in the history-long and cosmos-wide story of God’s redeeming love and stands as a testimony to his grace. God’s plan for the world is bigger than anything we could know; yet, out of his infinite goodness he lets us play our part, multiplying the loaves and fishes we offer him. This way of looking at things is humbling because it magnifies God’s grace and highlights how small our actions are in the big scheme of things, but at the same time it is exhilarating because it means that our small acts of obedience are being used of God to accomplish his eternal purposes. It endows our actions with eternal and cosmic significance.

How exciting to think that today, during a moment of ordinary faithfulness, God may use you to impact a life and change the world in a significant way that is beyond anything you could imagine.

Tom Baird is pastor of Bethel Community (Christian Reformed) Church in Edmonton, Alberta. Tom previously pastored churches in Kincardine and St. Thomas, Ontario before moving to Edmonton with his wife Janet in 2012.
Liz Gesch

No one ever said that life was a fairy tale, and the words “happily ever after” never appear in the scriptures. Rather, the Bible speaks of comfort and hope, perseverance and steadfastness. Joy comes in the morning, but that doesn’t mean that the night was a royal ball.

Our lives are full of fears. It seems like half of my friends suffer from debilitating anxiety. The media reports violence daily, and governments propose legislation to protect us from terrorism. The church wrings its hands over the decline in church attendance, the homosexual agenda, divisions between denominations, the legacy of abuse and freedom of religion.

Let me begin by saying that there is nothing wrong with fear. Fear is a natural response to danger or the unknown, strength or speed (the only time you’ll see me running and at its best, can spur us to do things we never dreamed possible. Sometimes that means superhuman feats of strength or speed (the only time you’ll see me running is when a bear is in hot pursuit), but in many cases fear paralyzes. The adrenaline surge is reserved for imminent danger, and the fears of everyday life grind us down into silent, passive versions of ourselves.

But we are not called to be a people of fear, but a people of hope!

The problem of fear

Fear of failure, fear of the unknown, fear of rejection, fear of ridicule: all of these things can leave us hiding in a locked room like the disciples on Easter Sunday.

Fear of saying the wrong thing (or rather saying things the wrong way) has kept me from speaking up against injustice, unethical behaviour and even offering simple ideas and suggestions to make things better at work, at school and in relationships.

Therein lies the problem of fear. It quashes our boldness and deprives not only us from thriving, but vanquishes any possibility of us contributing with our God-given gifts, talents and insights to the abundant life of others.

Fears cause us to retreat and fortify our position so we cannot be hurt, attacked, rejected, criticized or questioned. In religious circles, this strategy is all-too-familiar.

For some extreme examples of the exploitation of these fears I observe the political tactics of Nazi Germany, Stalin’s Soviet Union, Argentina’s dirty war and American McCarthyism. When we reflect back on these dark times in our history, our inclination is to say that we would not participate in the societal waves of suspicion and fear-based blame and scapegoating. Yet so many people like us did and still do.

Fear leaves us vulnerable to manipulation. Both those in power and those who feel powerless can use the legitimate fears of those in their communities to further a particular agenda. Fear-mongering is big business. Fear-mongering is the modus operandi of governments, special interest groups and faith leaders to rally support for their causes.

A way through

Hope, by contrast, is a way of life that prepares us for the long game. Rather than reacting to each successive threat, hope gives us a way to persevere in the face of challenges, fear and suffering. The Psalms are one of the best resources for a hope-filled attitude. The Psalms deal with not only joy but also with deep suffering, persecution and betrayal. Yet the Psalmist does not lose faith; rather he returns again and again to the stubborn insistence that the Lord is the source of refuge and strength. The Psalms do not merely call for vindication and salvation from enemies (a way out), but powerfully offer a way through adversity – asking for God’s presence, affirming his nearness, and even legitimizing raw expressions of anger and doubt – engaging with God when faith is tested most dearly.

Similarly, the lives of other Biblical figures and ultimately, Jesus’ life, give us models for how to remain strong in hope. If anyone is familiar with suffering and betrayal, it is Jesus. But even before the trials of his last days alive, his daily activities expose him as the ultimate hope-monger. Radically, he treated people as beloved children of God, even the undesirables (especially the undesirables). His association with these people did not end with a kind word or change from the shunning of the society around. Rather, he hung out with the sick and the sinner, the fishermen who so often just didn’t get it, the women, the commoners and even the religious leaders. He ate with them, visited them, touched them, taught them, cried with them and walked alongside them.

Pray for those who persecute you

I was recently at a retreat and was challenged to pray for my enemies. At first, I was thrilled that the speaker was asking me to do something I self-righteously think has been overlooked by too many Christians (but not by me) . . . but she went on. The challenge was not to pray for the foiling of their nasty plans, the failure of their exploitative business empires, or some straight up fire and brimstone. Truthfully, that would have been a lot easier. The challenge was to pray for them to be blessed; for abundant life to be theirs, as God wishes for all his children. I had to grit my teeth to offer this prayer for some of the most evil people in the world and the most infuriating people in my life. For the blessings of God on these persons I praised; for health (not some terrible, wasting disease), for a joyful family life (not the tearing apart of their families), for economic security (not to be plunged into the starvation and poverty of their victims). I could barely form the thoughts in my head. This is hope (and it is not easy).

What if our response to the fear-mongers in our society was hope-mongering? What if our messages affirmed the dignity of each person as a beautiful child of God? What if our daily activities began to take on the qualities of Jesus’ life on earth? How can we do this?

Hope-mongering techniques

I will offer a few ideas, but for each person, the hope-mongering will take on a different flavour, unique to your gifts, interests, communities and the people you encounter. These are my hope-mongering tactics:

Walk alongside people in the good times and the bad – especially the bad. For me, this sometimes involves emergency late-night tea dates; other times, a fresh batch of scones or a pie for someone who might need a sugar-induced smile, a song, a card in the mail, a gourmet meal (caution: you might have to help chop vegetables) or a tearful conversation in the car. The venue and medium do not matter as much as the Christ-inspired loving presence. Eschew artificial cheerfulness and the platitudes that discount real engagement. Hope does not mean painting a smile on your face, but many times it does mean opening your eyes to moments of real joy when they are least expected.

Speak up against fear-mongering messages, and promote more comprehensive understandings of the issue than the polarizing rhetoric of fear. Be willing to engage and question both our friends as well as leaders in discussions that grant all players dignity. Be willing to listen as well as speak. When the topic is terrorism, broaden the conversation from the act of violence or the act of religion of the perpetrator to the underlying issues. Openly claim responsibility for corporate sins that lead to injustice, violence and the subsequent attractiveness of extremism. When the topic is homosexuality and the Church, listen, listen and listen again to the testimony of the betrayed, attacked and abandoned members of the family of God. Acknowledge the pain that our words cause over and over again, reinforcing the fact that our churches are exclusive members-only clubs rather than open tables offering the bread of life. The most hopeful thing of all is that some people who have been brutalized and rejected by the church are still talking to us.

Push back against despair

Identify an area of your life that leaves you feeling bitter and negative, and work to turn the ugliness into service. Push back despair and work to make a difference. Like the old “no job too small” motto of a handyman, consider each act of hope-filled service a valuable contribution – a small piece of the kingdom that is now and is yet to come.

Deny the legitimacy of hopelessness. The attitude of “it won’t make any difference” is in many cases as damaging as fear-mongering. This is the more innocuous-seeming cousin of fear-mongering, but it results in wearing us down, discouraging us from acting and most importantly, convincing us that our actions are irrelevant. We may not immediately (or ever) truly see the impact of our hope-mongering ways, but nevertheless, let us boldly go forth to serve the Lord, ushering in the kingdom through acts of service (none too small)!
**Borderless**

**Brought home: the cost**

Brent van Staaldunen

Part III of ‘Brought Home,’ a series that re-examines our mindset towards missions.

After paying off our student loans a decade ago, my wife and I took on D, a World Vision sponsor child. Last month, we received one of her semi-regular updates, a pamphlet with space to sign her name and answer basic questions. We again encountered a scrawled signature and pencil sketches that looked exactly the same as the ones we received when we first started supporting her.

Before balance set in — my teacher-training reminding me about the frangibility of cognitive development and my lack of knowledge about D’s overall situation — I wondered, given that piece of paper is the only proof that our money touches anyone other than World Vision, where our money was really going.

Full confession: even after reason had its say, I still wonder about the financial side of our arrangement. I wonder about responsibility, and whether pre-authorizd withdrawals are most effectively supporting D, or are in fact doing more for the $981,000,000,000 World Vision machine.

**Missions, in every form**

When it comes to the resources we send overseas, I don’t separate disaster relief or poverty alleviation from our traditional definition of missions work: every dollar we remove from our bank accounts and designate towards missions — in every form — is a dollar we give back to God. The problem, as I see it, is that we overwhelmingly view the resources we send overseas as more valuable than the dollars we designate for work in our own neighbourhoods.

The well-meant monies my family sets aside for D are a prime example of this. When we had the means, our first instinct was to look at poverty overseas. Now, after being exposed to approaches that better balance the local versus overseas distribution of funds, I see how indoctrinated I was to the attitudes and messages I received as an afluent, white, suburban church kid and how my attitude needs to change.

I did ever question, for example, where our offering money went after those wooden plates were passed in church (whether in the first round, which was for budget and internal ministry, or the second — often empty — round where outside ministries were tacked on)? Was there ever critique or discussion about the percentage of our denominational fees that were designated for missions work? Did we simply give and assume that God’s money was being used responsibly?

**The machine**

The percentages are revealing. I’ve already taken issue with short-term missions, where wealthy people pay to drop into needy countries for a week of “service” that often does more harm than good. Like Doug Banister has in his excellent Christianity Today piece “Rethinking the $3,000 Missions Trip,” I’ve done the math: those funds, redistributed in our own communities, can have immediate, measurable results.

I think that we can apply the same fiscal measuring stick to the organizations we send money to, demanding a more equitable use of the funds we send. Particularly the larger, more top-heavy institutions. Before Synod 2015 voted to merge Christian Reformed Home Missions with Christian Reformed World Missions, for example, CRHM received 14 percent of every ministry share dollar, compared to 19 percent for CRWM. Although the merge’s goal is to streamline and increase efficiency, it will be interesting to see if that bias towards international missions can be rectified — five percent translates into a lot of money — and whether the percentages could be brought more towards equality.

**Is our first instinct to look at poverty overseas?**

Or even weighed more heavily in favour of domestic missions: equal isn’t always equal. The Southern Baptist Convention estimates that the average cost to send a single missionary overseas is U.S. $52,000 a year (and far higher for families), which can only increase as transportation, health insurance and other logistical costs continue to outpace inflation. Gone are the days where a missionary can grab a Bible, beg passage on a freighter and walk barefoot into the lands of the unchurched.

Should we stop ministering overseas? Of course not. But dollar for dollar, weighed against the far lower cost of helping train our own communities, can have immediate, observable results. I’ve already taken issue with short-term missions, where wealthy people pay to drop into needy countries for a week of “service” that often does more harm than good. Like Doug Banister has in his excellent Christianity Today piece “Rethinking the $3,000 Missions Trip,” I’ve done the math: those funds, redistributed in our own communities, can have immediate, measurable results.

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**My story from here**

Brent lives and finds his voice in Hamilton, Ont. To learn more about Brent, his writing and his publications, visit brentvans.com and follow him on Twitter @brentvans.

**Booze**

This post was written by Steve Mathonnet-VanderWell and originally posted on The Twelve – a blog written by 12 (sometimes more) people for the Perspectives Journal (blog.perspectivesjournal.org) whose purpose is to express the Reformed faith theologically; to engage issues that Reformed Christians meet in personal, ecclesiastical and societal life; and to thus contribute to the mission of the church of Jesus Christ.

Steve Mathonnet-VanderWell

When I was five years old, I knew I wanted to drink beer. In the mid 1960s I would watch Chicago Cubs games on TV. They were always sponsored by Hamm’s beer. I can still sing the jingle. “From the land of sky blue waters...” The Hamm’s beer bear would dance and sing. Perhaps I made a subconscious tie to the Cubs’ own mascot, not to mention Yogi and Boo-Boo, Baloo, Winnie the Pooh maybe even Smokey. Who says cute advertising aimed at kids doesn’t work?

I grew up in a teetotalling home. My mother had taken some sort of Nazirite vow (see Num. 6:1-21) as a teenager. My dad was less absolutist, but marital concession, harmony and all that. For me, thanks primarily to the Hamm’s bear (and perhaps also the Stevens family of Bewitched, who had a bar in their living room and enjoyed martinis at every possible opportunity), alcohol was cool — alluring, exotic, sophisticated — and definitely going to be part of my future.

And it is. In the summer heat, a gin and tonic with my wife on the back deck is a favoured ritual. All sorts of beers and ales — usually the local microbrew fare — all through the year. Martinis for celebrations and when I’m feeling semi-affluent. Sipping scotch or cream sherry in the winter. Marrying into a French family, wine is a basic human right.

This isn’t going where you might think it is. I’m not going to confess that I have a problem with alcohol. “Hello, my name is Steve and I am not an alcoholic.” But I will confess that despite my enjoyment of all sorts of booze, I do have some ambivalence and anxiety about it. Maybe it just proves how much my mother’s voice still rings in my conscience.

I read (actually I observe) that today’s young Christians, the millennials, are not burdened by my mother’s scruples. Dour teetotalling is not in. Millennials want to give witness to a faith of joy and delight, free from rules and guilt, where nothing God created is to be considered profane. Good for them. Like generations before them who wondered about movies or Lord’s Day observances, they are enjoying their freedom in Christ.

A few years ago, I was attending Wild Goose Fest — a celebration of Jesus, Birkenstocks and tattoos in the North Carolina hills. One of the activities was “Beer and Hymns.” A large, raucous crowd gathered to sing old hymns from memory while enjoying beer. They were having a good time. Many were probably on the edge of being inebriated. Still, it was far closer to fun than debauchery.

As I watched, an older friend — hardly a killyjo and not a teetotaller — observed, “I don’t think they have any sense of the heartache and tragedy alcohol brings.” My friend is a pastor. He has sat with alcoholics, watched families torn apart by alcohol, futures destroyed by the drink. I think he wondered if there wasn’t something perilously naïve about the crowd at “Beer and Hymns.”

This past Lent, I gave up alcohol — even on Sundays. It was harder than expected. Not that I craved a drink, but I am person of routines. There were simply certain times that felt like they deserved alcohol. I abstained in Lent for many reasons. I read online (so it must be true) that your liver can completely rejuvenate and cleanse itself in six weeks with no alcohol. Please, someone confirm that this is correct. I also know from experience, that I can drop five to 10 pounds quite quickly simply by not drinking. And while I’m not really worried about my alcohol consumption, I suppose I did want to show myself that I was in control of alcohol, and not vice-versa.

An Episcopal bishop is facing charges of drunk driving, hit-and-run and negligent homicide after killing a bicyclist. Richard Mouw recently shared that he is an alcoholic, now sober for 40 years.

Watching the movie version of Little Women with my children, I recall being struck that the March family’s “progressive” agenda of the 1860s included abolition, women’s suffrage and temperance. Could temperance ever again be a progressive cause of the 21st century? The movie version of Little Women with my children, I recall being struck that the March family’s “progressive” agenda of the 1860s included abolition, women’s suffrage and temperance. Could temperance ever again be a progressive cause of the 21st century?
An A - Z reflection on parenting small children

For a friend, who just had a baby.

A is for arms. If you thought they were handy before, wait till you see what you can do with them now. It’s astounding. As is the amount of pleasure they can bring with a wee one tucked between.

B is for bowls, and the unnatural interest you will take in them for the next year. The baby’s and yours.

C is for counter, as in kitchen counter, where everything is. Everything. It cannot be cleared.

D is for deprived: sleep-deprived, privacy-deprived, silence-deprived, energy-deprived. Selfishness-deprived.

E is for extraordinary, a reminder of a favourite quote (badly paraphrased here): “Don’t push your children to lead extraordinary lives. Instead, teach them to love ordinary life. Extraordinary will take care of itself.”

F is for feelings, the abundance of them, the glorious technicolour of motherhood. To be furious and in love simultaneously: that’s your new emotional spectrum.

G is for grapes. Not candy, but still bursting with sugary bribe-ability. A mom’s secret weapon. G is also for guilt, not nearly as useful but still ubiquitous.

H is for hats, never to be found when needed. Buy many of them and stash them everywhere.

I is for jam. Unlike hats, it can be found everywhere, like on the back of the couch just as your in-laws are walking in the door. (If you’re wondering what happened to “I,” it won’t be the first time.)

J is for kids because they travel in packs. Even if you have an only, your house will still be full of them. And you will like it because, for a few moments, your kid(s) will not be asking for snacks.

K is for kids because they travel in packs. Every time you have an only, your house will still be full of them. And you will like it because, for a few moments, your kid(s) will not be asking for snacks.

L is for licking, an activity that will become as common as breathing. You will get used to watching your child lick everything: shoe bottoms, elevator buttons, your face – often in that order. L is also, of course, for love, which you will wonder if you ever truly experienced before.

M is for Mom, your mom, and the shocking number of times each day you will want her.

N is for never, a word from your former life that will come back to embarrass you. Remember those promises you made as you watched your friend or sister wrangle her troublesome kid? I will never let my kid watch movies. I will never let my child talk to me like that. Here’s hoping you made those promises quietly to yourself.

O is for original, which is how every problem will feel. But it’s not, not even close.

P is for patience, the fruit of the Spirit which will suddenly vanish from your repertoire in around two and half years. But don’t worry; parenting is uniquely designed to cultivate it.

Q is for queen, because that is who you will be to your child. Along with heaps of menial labour, motherhood comes with honours that will sometimes take your breath away.

R is for risk and reward. Every parenting decision is heavy with risk and terrifying, but there is nothing quite like the reward of watching your child get it right.

S is for silliness, and the thousand wrongs of raising mutants. There was one set of twins, just the dorkiest, dimmest, dullest set of twins. There was one set of twins, just the dorkiest, dimmest, dullest set of twins.

T is for toddler time, which will crawl by so slowly some days you will want to scream. But if you quit fighting it, it will reveal beauty invisible to ordinary time.

U is for under-equipped, the real state of every human being who is handed a newborn baby. Babies are God’s way of equipping us to be human.

V is for victories, which you will experience in spades in the next few years. They are not the momentous occasions of your former life, but after two years of foul diapers and stars on the chart, a pee on the toilet is like summiting Everest.

W is for weak, and the way you will cling to 2 Corinthians 12:9: “For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

X is for spots on the growth chart, shooting skyrocket with astonishing speed. Apparently there are only 940 Saturdays between your baby’s birth and departure for college.

Y is for you, the rich person you are becoming through this unpredictable, sometimes trying, experience of motherhood.

Z is for nothing that I can think of, which is really how most parenting advice should end. Because in the end, Mama truly does know best.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ontario, with her husband, James, and daughter, Clare. She teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College and is sorry to report that she has not been able to read a book all month. She is looking forward to school starting.

The little things in life

Once of the wonderful aspects of having grandchildren is to once again see life through young eyes. My grandson, Daniel, is gifted with a vivid imagination. He’s the kind of boy who makes body armour out of coffee cans and then invites his daddy to shoot arrows at him. His little sister, Casey, views life as one big adventure, constantly looking for new mountains to climb, always eager to explore the world around her and exercise the busy little legs God gave her. (Good thing her mom, and the shock of coming from the womb, have given her the strength for this.)

Our almost-four-year-old, Romario, is fascinated by letters, numbers and shapes. He will tell you it’s “not a diamond” but a “thombus.” He notices minute details, remembers amazing facts and finds phonics somehow soothing.

And then there’s Abigail, who just turned one last week. While I wonder how these last twelve months have slipped by so quickly, she’s busy savouring the little pleasures in life. She is mesmerized by the spinning blades of a ceiling fan, fascinated by the chubby squirrels in her backyard and thrilled at the sight of solid foods on the dinner table, especially blueberries. She is, for now at least, the rarest breed — “a good eater.”

What possible birthday gift could I get for a little girl whose daily business is discovering the free-to-be-had treasures all around her? Stephanie’s suggestion of a baby doll appealed to me. I set off to find just the right one. How hard could it be? I wanted a sweet-looking baby with a soft body, big enough for a toddler to snuggle with or drag around the house.

The first store I visited had a whole section of dolls and accessories. I picked one off the shelf and nearly jumped out of my skin as the doll next to it began to laugh and wave its arms. It took me a minute to figure out that it was motion activated. “That’s freaky,” I said aloud. The young man stocking shelves simply looked up at me and shrugged.

The search

The doll in my hands was quite pretty, but her torso was rock solid. I pressed the “Bay-bee” into the stroller. Her bright pink tutu swayed happily back and forth as she rammed into furniture and walls. Her driving technique needs work, but the maternal instincts are solid.

Watching her I realized the search for the “perfect” gift was for my own sake. Abigail would have been happy with whatever I gave her.

There’s so much we can learn from our little ones. Including (and especially) taking joy in the little things in life. We should all be so grateful.

Heidi Vander Slikke lives in Harriston, Ontario.
Wild harvest

Parent of today’s varieties

The crabapple is actually the wild apple, source of all domestic apples grown today.

When I was a youngster my mother would make applesauce from crabapples, usually in November. Neighbours found it rather amusing that we would go to all the work of gathering bushel baskets of the sour little apples and making applesauce out of them. I’d climb into huge trees and shake the branches and then we’d pick them off the ground.

I recall my mother cutting the apples in half and boiling them, and then we’d use the applesauce extractor – a silver-coloured mill with a handle that turns and extracts the sauce from the peelings and the seeds. The crabapple sauce would ooze out in a rich, red colour. It was tasty and especially good with fried potatoes. It’s been many years since I had crabapple sauce, but I can still see and remember the fresh, tart taste.

I have a fair-sized crabapple tree on the farm and some years the branches are so full they hang down to the ground. Every summer I look at the tree and remind myself I should make a little applesauce in the fall. I usually make it from McIntosh apples. This year, however, the crabapple tree is loaded so I might just make some sauce. Dutch folks will eat applesauce (appelmoes) anywhere and anytime. It’s a national staple and great care is taken to extract the flavours from various types of apples. You must never let the apples become pulpy. The best applesauce is made from good, firm apples.

Simple recipe

Here’s how my mom did it: Cut the apples in quarters and cut away the core. Don’t waste time peeling the apples. After washing the quarters, place them into large pots and add just enough water to cover the bottom to a depth of 1 or 2 inches. Add a dusting of cinnamon and a lemon peeling or two (no sugar needed). Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and cover with a lid. Boil gently until the apples are tender, stirring occasionally. Make sure the apples don’t burn. Watch them closely. When they’re ready, dump them into a large pie-plate container. Set the applesauce extractor on a large bowl or a pot – something that fits. Take a large ladle and fill the extractor about three-quarters full. When you turn the handle, pure applesauce comes out the bottom. Freeze the applesauce and you’ll enjoy it year-round. Applesauce is perfect when you serve beef, pork, chicken or turkey. It’s wonderful with fried potatoes. Sometimes I’ll even eat it as a dessert.

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew-area (eastern Ont.) farmer. Every fall he makes apple sauce from one or two bushels of McIntosh apples.

Our mandate to work AND to keep

Hetch Hetchy Reservoir has provided fresh water and a clean source of electricity for 80 years.

The difficulty is that even if we recognize stewardship as consisting of this two-fold mandate, we have an extremely difficult time practicing it. Even if we avoid the pitfalls of development idolatry or environment idolatry, we likely find ourselves feeling like we are simply conducting a balancing act, doing a certain amount of “working” balanced by a certain amount of “keeping.” But can we envision what stewardship of creation that does not pit development against creation care looks like? Are we able to see what it looks like to use creation in a way that allows humans to flourish and the creation to flourish, both in glory to God?

In obedience

As a particular case study in these questions, let’s briefly reconsider the Hetch Hetchy project. This reservoir has provided fresh mountain water to a large metropolis for almost a hundred years and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future. It has altered the landscape of the valley surrounding the reservoir. In this case, one could perhaps argue that the alteration has been for the better, since the Hetch Hetchy Valley prior to the dam was a relatively desolate, semi-arid, rugged track with little vegetation; now it is a sparkling blue lake surrounded by mountains and waterfalls. While qualification of stewardship that works and keeps is certainly subjective, to my eye it seems that the Hetch Hetchy project has allowed humans to flourish by providing fresh water and a clean source of electricity, and it has allowed the creation to flourish by creating a beautiful mountain lake out of a previously desolate desert valley. And just to be clear, while Hetch Hetchy may be an example of responsibility working and keeping the creation, plenty of dams and reservoirs have destroyed previously flourishing habitats and may be case studies in development idolatry.

In the end, we are unlikely to have straightforward, clear-cut answers regarding whether our specific actions are obediently working and keeping God’s creation. However, my prayer is that as the Spirit works within us he continues to open our eyes to our object of worship, and that he helps us recognize when our worship is straying towards either engineering-idol or environmentalism rather than towards our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the praise and the glory!

Justin Vander Werff currently serves as associate professor of engineering and department chair at Dordt College, where he teaches civil engineering courses with a focus on being a Christ-follower. He along with his wife and four children live in Sioux Center, Iowa.
Clean water institute opens at Calvin College

Amanda Greenhoe

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan (Calvin College) – It was the spring of 2012. Calvin College professor of engineering David Wunder was more than 1,000 miles away from the college when he received the call that eventually led to the formation of the Clean Water Institute of Calvin College (CWICC), which opened in early July.

On sabbatical in Austin, Texas, Wunder listened as Calvin’s senior associate to the president, Bob Berkhof, shared a vision for a water institute at the college, an idea that had been stirring among a small group of alumni. The conversation piqued Wunder’s personal and professional interest, so he penciled in a summer meeting to explore Calvin’s role in this new endeavour.

Little did he know he was taking on an ambitious interdisciplinary project that would span multiple years and involve numerous collaborators. All he knew was that it seemed to be an idea he couldn’t shake – and didn’t want to.

A few months later, Wunder and Berkhof were sitting down with those alumni at a café in the East Hills neighborhood of Grand Rapids to discuss their vision for “an institute at Calvin focused on water and sanitation in developing countries,” as Wunder puts it. There was no official name for the institute and no clear path forward, just a dedication to the hope of what it could be. “Although the original conversation included a group of just five of us, the excitement and the fit at Calvin has been there for decades,” Wunder said. “There are tremendous complements across campus for this kind of work.”

The institute experienced exponential support as word spread across campus. For Matt Walhout, dean for research and scholarship, the support was not surprising because, he said, the idea aligns so closely with what Calvin is as an institution. “This new institute promotes Calvin’s mission in so many ways,” said Walhout. “Its root motivation is found in a gospel-inspired vision of flourishing communities. Its work draws on the technical expertise of Calvin’s faculty, students and institutional partners.”

By late 2014, the basic idea behind the institute had resonated with many, gaining the force of a formal proposal, campus-wide endorsements from a variety of departments and a trailblazing donor at the ready. In November last year the concept passed through the approval process in the faculty senate. And on July 1, 2015, the doors of the CWICC opened.

An interdisciplinary approach

Though Wunder, who will serve as the institute’s first director, is an engineer, he sees the path to clean water extending far beyond his field. “Water and sanitation overseas is not just a technical issue. It’s an issue that really links to watershed-based, community-based approaches and shifts in practice,” he says.

Wunder expects the institute to draw from the disciplines of international development, public health, social work and political science. He said that even with the various academic approaches, some guiding concepts are already in the works for another cross-North-America ride in 2017. You can keep up to date by going to seatosea.org for more information.

This year’s Sea-to-Sea bike tour raises quarter-million dollars for ministry while creating indelible memories

Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan (CRCNA/World Renew) – Betty Adam woke up knowing that it was going to be a day that she put herself to the test. She planned to cycle 100 kilometers and climb 2,025 meters to the summit of Going to the Sun Road in Montana as the last challenge of a summer committed to helping people in poverty.

“I was at one kilometer to go when a fellow cyclist slowed as he descended to yell at me, ‘You’re almost there, Betty – keep pedaling!’ so I did just that,” she recalled. “The final curve looked to be a steeper grade; but it was either an illusion, or the lure of reaching the top was so strong that I just kept pedaling strongly to the top.”

Adam was one of 41 cyclists who spent 10 days in August cycling 870 kilometers from Jasper, Alberta, to Glacier National Park in Montana as part of Sea to Sea West. Her climb up Going to the Sun Road marked the completion of her journey and was also the final stage of Sea to Sea 2015. This was the second Sea to Sea event to take place this summer. The first event took place in July and included 27 riders in southern Ontario.

Combined, the 68 riders raised more than $250,000 for World Renew, Partners Worldwide and International Justice Mission.

Adam, a Canadian who participated in Sea to Sea 2013 across the United States, is an avid cyclist who had put more than 3,350 kilometers on her bike this year before even starting the Sea to Sea West ride. She was eager to get back on her bike for a good cause. In fact, she has cycled for charity for the past 18 summers including rides for Bikes for Bibles (Canadian Bible Society), Sea to Sea and Love in Motion (Christian & Missionary Alliance Churches of Canada).

When the Sea to Sea West ride was over, Adam noted that the fellowship, scenery and physical challenges of the ride were everything she hoped it would be. “This was an extraordinary trip,” she wrote on her blog. “We had an almost perfect safety record – only a couple of contexts,” he said. “Contexts that address real problems, real communities, real assets in indigenous communities and real partnerships around the world.”

The next chapter

Wunder says the many Calvin students and faculty members who have already shown interest and expertise in clean-water issues and have participated in various project overseas, will play an important role as the center grows and shows its potential. He also says he hopes the institute will draw new people to campus, stressing the necessity of Calvin partnering with other experts in the field, some of whom have already stepped forward to express interest in the institute.

Wunder is working on a team to vet possible partnerships in Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti and other countries, exploring project compatibility with the institute’s resources and expertise. Coming alongside work that is already being done in developing countries, and enhancing it through the institute’s resources, Wunder explains, will bring the greatest prospect for success.

And any success from Calvin and its partners, he said, comes only by God’s grace. It is grace that has seemingly made a way for this massive undertaking – from first phone call to grand opening – over the past three years. Wunder and his team pray that the same grace will guide years of solutions, long after he leaves his post as director. “That we can solve problems is a reasonable expectation,” Wunder insists. “But it is presumptuous to think that we can do anything that God hasn’t already ordained.”

This work will transform not only communities, but the students and faculty involved.
The Lord suddenly called home out of our midst, Clifford VanderPloeg
in his 56th year on August 10th, 2015. Beloved son of John & Anna VanderPloeg of Shallow Lake, ON. Cherished brother of Florence & Tom Ingerson, Florida Agnes & Beau Cruz, Arizona Stuart & Rose VanderPloeg, Ponoka, AB Wes & Gloria VanderPloeg, Okotoks, AB Tom & Pat VanderPloeg, Calgary, AB; Janice Jamieson, Wetaskiwin, ON Glen & Rhonda VanderPloeg, Owen Sound, ON Ed & Jennifer VanderPloeg, Shallow Lake ON Richard & Tania VanderPloeg, High River, AB Harold & Helena VanderPloeg, Listowel, ON Dear husband of Marilyn (Baarda) VanderPloeg. Dear father of Alyssa in BC, Jared and Noah in ON. “Till we meet again at Jesus’ feet.” Mailing address for John and Anna: Fire # 282245 Side Road 15 R.R. #1 Shallow Lake ON N0H 2K0.

Wilma (Weening) Bennik
of Rimbey, AB, passed into Glory to be with her Lord and Savior on Sunday, August 16, 2015. at the age of 78. Wilma will be lovingly remembered and missed by her loving husband Joe of 59 years, her children Sy (Grace) Bennik, Audrey (Pete) deKlerk, Joanne (Cor) Brouwsema and Carolyn (James) Vanderhoek, 18 grandchildren and 25 great grandchildren (3 on the way), one sister Shirley (Henry) Valstar and four brothers, Walter(Gerda) Phil (Janet) Clarence (Jean) Ed (Hinke) Weening. Wilma was pre-deceased by her infant grandson Benjamin Vanderhoek(1987).

Announcement
Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at Sep. 17 at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching. It is with deep regret to announce that we will be discontinuing the Dutch Services in Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at the end of 2015. Attendance has been declining over the last few years, understandably the need is not there anymore. Our last Dutch Service will be held on Nov. 15, 2015. Phil and Freddie Muys

Job Opportunity - 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, and 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 tsuccession@gmail.com or call the Committee’s chairperson, Stan Baker at 905-440-6583.

Maranatha CRC
of Lethbridge AB is celebrating 40 years of God’s faithfulness. Events will be held on Oct 9-11 including a talent show, banquet and a special Thanksgiving service. Friends and former members are welcome to join us. Check out www.maranathacrca.ca or call 403-381-7744 for more details.

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DAY BY ENCOURAGEMENT

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Maranatha Homes, located in south Burlington near many amenities, is a place where Christian seniors can enjoy independent living in community with others. • Reasonable rent rates at $521 per month • Newly renovated units • Award winning architectural design • Well maintained building and grounds • No condo fees or utility bills All this and more make Maranatha Homes an attractive and affordable accommodation for seniors.
For further information contact: Rosanne van der Woerd 109-3260 New St. Burlington ON L7N 3L4 905-681-0311 Email: rvanderwoerd@gmail.com

Vacations
Holiday accommodation in Holland with vehicle rentals and tours. chestnutlane.nl

On Wednesday, September 16 at 12:15, organist Dr. Jonathan Oldengarm opens St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church’s Fall 2015 Noon Hour Concerts season. A freewill donation is requested; bring your own lunch, or buy one for $6 at the door. For more info, visit http://www.standrewskw.com/concerts/ or call 519.578.4430. Church address: 54 Queen St. N., Kitchener, ON

CALENDAR OF EVENTS
Contact admin@christiancourier.ca to have an event listed here. Cost: $10 or free with a display ad. Calendar of Event listings are limited to 1-5 lines.
Sep 27 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching. (See ad for more information)
Oct 3 Netherlands Bazaar, Thornhill Community Centre, 7755 Bayview Ave. (corner Bayview Ave. and John St.) Thornhill. Marketplace, restaurant, auction, music and much more. For more information, please visit www.netherlandsbazaar.com
Oct 17 Day of Encouragement, Ancaster, Ontario. For details go to dayofencouragement.ca
Nov 7 Halton Hills Christian School 50th Anniversary Celebration Gala. See ad.
Dec 4 Christmas Christian Festival Concert by the choirs of the Ontario Christian Music Assembly. Leendert Koolij directing.

Archived issues of Christian Courier can be found on our website. christiancourier.ca Family and job ads can be accessed by clicking the Classifieds link on the top right banner. Be sure to check us out on Facebook and follow us on Twitter. We welcome your feedback.
Classifieds

DEADLINE
Christian Courier is published on the second and fourth Mondays of the month. Deadline for each issue is 13 days prior to publication date.

RATES:
All personal and family announcements: $7.00 per square inch.
Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: $8.00 per square inch.

SUBMITTING YOUR AD:
E-mail admin@christiancourier.ca
Mail: 2 Aiken St., St. Catharines ON L2N 1V8
More information on our website: christiancourier.ca

Reading a hand-me-down copy of CC?

Call 1-800-969-4838
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Low Interest Rates?
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<th>Charitable receipt</th>
<th>Tax Free</th>
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<tr>
<td>Male 70</td>
<td>5.97% $1,194</td>
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<td>$1,064</td>
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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 |

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

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7:30 PM
Rehoboth United Reformed Church
77 Glancaster Rd
Ancaster
ON L9G 3K9

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7:30 PM
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Ontario
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Canadian seminary conducts research project on pastors’ health, wellness

TORONTO (CCNS) – Wycliffe College, an evangelical Anglican seminary at the University of Toronto, is in the second year of a unique research project to explore and understand the stress and satisfaction of ministry life.

The Wycliffe Wellness Project launched in July of 2014 and continues to seek new participants for the study.

The project is a long-term study and assessment tool aimed at better understanding the ups and downs of ministry life. The goal is to gain insight into the aspects of ministry life that are particularly stressful and especially satisfying, and how these “stressors” and “satisfiers” affect the experience of ministry life.

Wanda Malcolm, a clinical psychologist and professor of pastoral psychology at Wycliffe College, is directing the study. “It is like a vocational wellness checkup,” she said.

Participants complete a series of confidential questionnaires and have the option of receiving a personal feedback summary and taking part in a confidential post-survey conversation that will help both participants and researchers understand the findings. They are then asked to participate in check-ups at three-year intervals. “Of course, clergy can withdraw from the study at any time,” said Malcolm. “But we believe they will find it as beneficial as we will.”

Malcolm continued, “The research should help us better prepare students for ministry life by helping us better understand what creates the most stress and what supports vocational wellness. We will have a much clearer sense of how to best support clergy wellness as a seminary but also as a church.”

She asserted, “The individuals who participate will also come to understand their own ‘wellness’ better and how they can care for themselves, and in turn [how to] be more available to their families and the people they minister to in ways that are emotionally and spiritually healthy.”

Interested participants can visit wycliffewellnessproject.com for more information.³⁶

Deadline approaching for Christian Courier contests

Honouring faithful subscribers

This October, Christian Courier will celebrate our 70th anniversary, D.V. We can trace our history back to the first issue of the Canadian Calvinist, published in Alberta in 1945 with founding father Rev. Paul De Koekkoek as Editor. The Ontario-born Contact began in 1949, run by John Vander Vliet and John Vellinga. The two papers merged in 1949 to become the Calvinist Contact and, later, Christian Courier.

We would like to honour long-term (we’re talking decades) subscribers in our Anniversary issue in October. If you can remember editors like Ad Otten and Dick Farenhorst, please get in touch! We’d love to know how many of these 70 years you’ve been enjoying CC. If you are able, please email a photo of yourself holding a recent copy of the paper to editor@christiancourier.ca.

Discovering God at work

For many years CC published personal ads. My grandmother met her second husband by replying to one of these ads, a fact she shared with her family 20 years later. Now and then, people email me other stories like that – that time a CC article was lost, found, read by a stranger, written by a loved one . . . used by God. If this paper has somehow played a role in your life, please let us know by emailing editor@christiancourier.ca. We can maintain anonymity if you wish.

Winners for each category will receive a CC subscription to gift to a recipient of your choice.

Share this note with those you think might have something to contribute.

The deadline for submissions is Wed., Sept. 23.

Thank you!

–Angela Reitsma Bick, Editor.

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