AIRPORTS WERE FINALLY OPENING AND COVID TESTING was now available to Canadians. Should our family return to Malawi? In the months I spent fighting COVID alongside other nurses in Canada, it seemed Malawi had been relatively spared. So we boarded a plane back to Malawi, arriving January 6, 2021, after 10 months in Canada. I was offered the first dose of the vaccine the day we left but couldn’t squeeze it in before our trip to the airport. I didn’t think it would matter because throughout December there had been few to no COVID cases reported in Malawi. My second chance for the vaccine would be when it arrived in Malawi the second week of March, and by then everything had changed.

“THE WHOLE ATMOSPHERE at Summit has changed,” Co Vanderlaan says of his retirement home, now that its residents have received the COVID-19 vaccine. He and his wife Alice echo the feelings of many. “We are so relieved. So thankful. So excited. Maybe soon we can see our grandchildren. We’ve had two great-grandchildren born during the pandemic and we’ve only seen them through the window.”

Early in the pandemic, Summit Village was locked down following one case of COVID-19. The six individuals who had been in contact with that person were immediately quarantined. Since then, there have been no more cases. Vanderlaan says. But uncertainty and stress remained for residents, who had questions such as: When will I be able to get the vaccine? Where will I need to go? How will I get there? How will I register?

“Uncertain Times,” written by Elise Stolte, was the headline on the front page of the Edmonton Journal on February 5. The article focused on how the COVID-19 vaccine shortage, together with a lack of information about Alberta’s vaccine plan and confusion about eligibility rules, had created stress and anxiety among seniors. It featured Summit Village, an independent-living residence for those age 55 and over, including an interview with Co Vanderlaan, current president of the co-op association. It is estimated that around 85 percent of seniors thankful for COVID-19 vaccine, though questions about visiting remain. | Janet Greidanus
the 125 tenants living at Summit Village are Christian, 30 percent of them Christian Reformed.

The situation changed less than a month later. Vaccinations would not be provided on site but on the morning of February 24, all Albertans age 75 and older were able to book appointments – online and by phone – at designated clinics. It was stressful for those who lacked computer skills (and perhaps even the computer) to book online. Vanderlaan and other co-op Board members helped, and several got help from their children. Initially, phone lines were jammed and the provincial website kept crashing as the COVID-19 vaccination booking system became overwhelmed. By the next day, however, most were able to get an appointment. The issue around transportation was solved when pharmacies were given permission to provide the vaccine. A number of residents cancelled their previous bookings and simply walked across the street to the Safeway pharmacy.

For retired Christian Reformed Church (CRC) pastor Gordon Pols and his wife Ann, who also live at Summit Village, “This COVID time has been a lonely time. Other than picking up a few groceries, we have not been out of our suite! About two weeks ago we got our first vaccine shots; the second [will be] on April 19.” Like the Pols, most seniors look ahead to relief from isolation and to the day when they can visit with friends and family again. At the time of this writing, Alberta does not allow any indoor gatherings of any size and Summit Village still does not allow visitors.

A SPIRITUAL TOLL

“It cannot be understated how difficult the distance and separation from their loved ones has been on our residents,” said Darren Sinke, Executive Director of Emmanuel Home, a supportive Christian community in northeast Edmonton offering both independent and assisted living for approximately 260 seniors. “The lack of socializing and activities at Emmanuel Home, the shorter and darker winter days, and the limitations on regular and frequent corporate worship only add to the difficulty of managing this pandemic,” he explained. “There has definitely been an emotional and spiritual toll. But, with spring on its way and the vaccine being rolled out, there is also a renewed sense of seeing that light at the end of the tunnel in terms of getting back to normal.”

There have been a few cases of COVID-19 in Emmanuel Home over the past three months but each time, limitations were able to be placed on the positive cases and exposures, thanks to rigorous protocols and hard work by both residents and staff. “We have seen first-hand how easily the virus can spread but, with thanks to the Lord, we have not lost any residents,” said Sinke. On March 5, Emmanuel Home was able to lift its “outbreak” status.

At the time of writing, almost half of Emmanuel Home’s staff and over 95 percent of its residents had received their second dose of the vaccine. “There was definitely a sense of hope and relief when the vaccine was made available,” said Sinke, “and it was fun to see the smiles when the Alberta Health Services team showed up on site to administer the vaccine.”

Sini Den Otter, 85, lives independently in an apartment at Emmanuel Home. “I am relieved to have received two shots of the Pfizer vaccine,” she said. “The vaccine has been received with gladness. There is a sense of hope and relief as the weather lifts our spirits.”

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF ‘OUTBREAK’

Holland Christian Homes in Brampton, Ontario is a community of over a thousand Christian seniors living in six independent living apartment towers and two long-term care facilities. The care homes were particularly hard hit this past year. Sadly, since the beginning of the pandemic, 44 people have died of COVID-19 – 14 in Grace Manor and 30 in Faith Manor, the long-term care homes. At the time of this writing, precautions remain in place. Only essential visitors are welcome in the towers and essential visitors showing negative COVID tests can enter the Manors, which are currently COVID-free.

Pastor Richard Bodini from Heritage Fellowship CRC serves as chaplain at Holland Christian Homes. “People are anxious and want the vaccine so that they can begin to return to some normal activities like visiting one another, to encourage and support one another as neighbours and as a church,” he said.

By February 12, about 98 percent of the residents in both Faith and Grace Manor had received both doses of the vaccine. A very high percentage of the staff connected to both homes also received the vaccine, including Bodini. An update on March 23 revealed that almost 650 first vaccines had also been given to tenants in the towers.
MALAWI CONTINUED

to be closing soon. Before leaving, we did everything we could to prepare the missions hospital we work at to be ready to face an impending disaster. I met with the ministry of health to liaise between them and our missionary medical facility. How would our HIV population fare against a health crisis like COVID?

Malawi has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world. Over 1.1 million of its 18 million population live with this endemic disease. The first ICU in Malawi was only formed in 1990 and the total ICU beds pre-pandemic was 25. Only seven of those had ventilators. We all wondered what would happen as the virus hit Malawi.

Malawi’s borders and airports shut down two days after our flight out. God miraculously provided a home for us in Vancouver. I ended up working in two different emergency rooms. It was like whiplash. I went from an environment with few resources to one where people threw them out. From a place that was scrambling to find Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to get ready for impending disaster, to a place that had new gowns for each and every patient interaction. I often struggled watching supplies go to waste. Should I dig extra unused equipment out of the trash to take back to Malawi? Even worse, I saw a population of people who didn’t realize the wealth they had and were anxious that it wasn’t enough. It hardly seemed proportionate.

MALAWI AND COVID IN 2020

Malawi was one of the last countries in the world to report a COVID case, perhaps because of the lack of access to testing. The “first wave” was moderately small. By early June, only 14 testing sites were set up in Malawi and only one-third of the 255 health facilities in the country had any oxygen supplies at all. We watched with bated breath from Canada.

Amazingly, though the Malawian government announced a 21-day lockdown to start on April 18, the citizens of Malawi fought the ruling and the high court barred the lockdown. With a GDP per person of only $389 a year, making Malawi the second poorest country in the world, we were relieved that our Malawian brothers and sisters would not be prevented from running small businesses and getting crucial access to food and resources.

As the months continued things seemed to go back to normal, as our colleagues remaining in Malawi would tell us. Churches reopened, and for a nation that looks to education for the future of its largely young population, there was a collective sigh of relief when schools did as well.

QUARANTINE AS ANXIETIES RISE

Arriving back in Malawi on January 6, 2021, we started our 14-day quarantine anticipating the joy of re-uniting with colleagues and friends and going to church. Six days later we started hearing the reports: the number of COVID cases was doubling every four to five days. COVID arrived with repatriating Malawians from South Africa. Within days the numbers climbed to over 1,000 new cases a day. We completed our quarantine when anxieties were at a record high.

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WHAT NEXT?

As with the rest of the world, the economic and social impacts of this disease remain to be seen. With schools still struggling to open as teachers strike because of their lack of protection in overcrowded classrooms, and teenage pregnancy still on the rise, how will Malawi rebound? With young business owners struggling to cross borders and import products from South Africa and Tanzania, and colleges unable to run virtual classes because of expensive and poor-quality internet, how big are the setbacks?

With the number of transitions our family has undergone, through every rise and fall of COVID numbers, we have seen God’s faithfulness. So it is with Malawi. This resilient people is seeing decreasing COVID numbers for the first time in two months. God is in this country and as her people call upon him in new ways, we all wait to see the hand of God.

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The government declared a state of emergency and closed schools again on February 8. I started to work alongside my colleagues in our COVID tent. We have an outdoor nursing station, a donning and doffing tent, and a patient treatment tent. The rainy season can make this outdoor nursing a messy work. It’s not remotely pleasant at nighttime with mosquitoes, leaking ceilings and power outages. During the day, we limit how much time we spend in the tent – donning and doffing carefully, only going in to see the patients a few times a day. We have to get creative about grouping our tasks together to limit patient interactions, without compromising nursing care. I am thankful that patients are usually required to have “guardians” with them. This means a family member or friend acts as a personal care attendant to the patient and stays with them at all times. The risk to that one family member is high, but it helps limit the movement of multiple people in and out of the tents all day.

When I started working, the fear was palpable. Was our protection adequate? My husband and I wondered what would happen if I got sick or if our kids got sick. Medical evacuation has changed indefinitely. We started seeing firsthand the reality that whole Malawian families were being devastated by this illness. Patients would come to us having lost spouses and siblings and cousins all within days of each other. Patients were dead upon arrival or dying quickly after presenting with symptoms. Their oxygen requirements were impossibly difficult to meet with the main and only oxygen source in the country running out of supplies. In a culture that rallies around each other in death, Malawians are being prevented from attending funerals and practicing traditions because of the reality of such quick losses. I could sense the secondary trauma among my colleagues.

MIXED REALITY

Having recently fought tampered election results through democratic and legal means, having survived Hurricane Idai floods, famines and the horrendous reality of the HIV pandemic, Malawians have proven yet again their resilience. Corruption is being flushed out in new ways by the pandemic. The government fired a large part of its COVID task force when it was evident they could not account for why their funds had not led to increases in oxygen supplies and PPE to the desperate health facilities.

Further, the government opened a stadium treatment centre and new companies have arisen to meet the demand for oxygen production. This can only be good news for this country where so often lack of oxygen causes HIV patients with conditions like PCP pneumonia to die. Though there are few statistics available yet, the spike in COVID proved what the WHO recognized was true in Malawi: this country has made remarkable improvements in education for the future of its largely young population, there was a collective sigh of relief when schools did as well. It hardly seemed proportionate.

By early June, only 14 testing sites were set up in Malawi and only one-third of the 255 health facilities in the country had any oxygen supplies at all. We watched with bated breath from Canada. Amazingly, though the Malawian government announced a 21-day lockdown to start on April 18, the citizens of Malawi fought the ruling and the high court barred the lockdown. With a GDP per person of only $389 a year, making Malawi the second poorest country in the world, we were relieved that our Malawian brothers and sisters would not be prevented from running small businesses and getting crucial access to food and resources.

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It seemed I was meant to fight the pandemic on both sides of the globe.
A PLEA FOR UNITY IN THE CHURCH DURING COVID

Angela Reitsma Bick | Editor
Angela, a member of Hope Fellowship Church in Courtice, Ontario, has been Editor of Christian Courier for 12 years.

THE FIRST LIBERATION BEGAN IN UTRECHT.

It was August 1944, after the Synod of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands kicked Klaas Schilder out of the denomination. It was a disagreement over common grace. This decision triggered one of the largest Dutch church splits since the Reformation. Over the next two years, 80,000 people followed Schilder out the door. It was dubbed “the Liberation” by those who left for having freed themselves from the authority of Synod.

The other Liberation began in Antwerp.

September 1944. Crops that summer had been terrible. The Nazis were blocking all imports of food. The Dutch had already survived more than four years of occupation, not to mention being caught underneath awful air battles between Britain and Germany. After reclaiming Antwerp, the First Canadian Army moved up the Scheldt river into the Netherlands. Can you imagine how eagerly the Dutch tracked the progress of those Canadian troops? By April, Apeldoorn was freed. Then Groningen. Amsterdam. Finally, the Nazis surrendered. The official Liberation was complete.

The ecclesiastical Liberation, however, continued. Two years of painful splits among the denomination’s two million members. The Reformed community in the Netherlands fractured, while the same debates crossed an ocean to splinter congregations in North America.

When physical survival is so severely threatened – as it was in ’44 by famine on top of war – I used to assume that theology would slip down a notch or two in importance. But this timeline shows that’s not true. While Dutch citizens were literally starving to death, pastors were being shot or imprisoned and many Reformed folks themselves were in hiding or active in the resistance, church members still took an inflexible stand on relatively minor doctrinal issues.

Today’s landmines

Liberation from the virus began in Quebec City.

December 2020. Six thousand Pfizer doses were shipped from Europe to Montreal, offering Canadians freedom from the threat of infection. Now, like the Dutch waiting for the First Canadian Army, we’re all eagerly tracking the progress of vaccine distribution. But a year of pandemic life has changed us. Stress and uncertainty have shrunk our patience and tested our goodwill. I see it in outraged emails, in bristly online comments. I hear it in the weary, leery voices of friends and family, stepping carefully around today’s landmines – masks, restrictions, vaccines. I feel it in the panicky undercurrent of discussions about the Christian Reformed Church’s Human Sexuality Report.

COVID-19 is testing the fabric of our relationships on every level, and the church is no exception. But it doesn’t have to end in schism. I beg you to pause before sending an angry email, before rolling your eyes, before judging, before lecturing, before taking a final stand. This is not the time to pick the hills worth dying on. We haven’t been together in church buildings for more than a year; this is not the right moment to kick someone out or to storm out.

I didn’t know any of this, until my dad mentioned recently that infant baptism was a contentious topic during the war. “During the war?” I thought. Surely not. Then I started digging. It was first time I had heard of the “other” Liberation. How could 80,000 people all decide, during the grief and danger of war, to abandon home churches over doctrine? It seems foolhardy to precipitate more change during a time of such tumult.

But COVID has given me new understanding of these old quarrels. Stress and uncertainty shrink our patience and test our goodwill. Maybe church doctrine felt like one of the only things left within their control.

I see those same dynamics happening now.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

Research for this article came from many sources, most notably George Harinck’s article, “The Reception of the Liberation of 1944 in Christian Reformed Circles,” from the Free University in Amsterdam. He points out that the Netherlands Reformed Churches apologized for deposing Schilder in 1988, forty years after the war. Schilder died in ’52. The churches remain fragmented to this day.
REFORMED GIFTS FOR TODAY

Mike Wagenman | Guest Editor

Mike is campus minister at Western University (London, Ont.) where he teaches theology and culture.

PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN NORTH AMERICA is especially turbulent. I often want to call “time out.” The responses to Jim Joosse’s recent article on human rights (Nov. 16, 2020) pushed me to dive in with this call for our reflection.

The topic of human sexuality is only the most recent “issue” in a long list of important questions. It won’t be the last. I’m concerned about how we engage these questions. So far, most of what I’ve observed is that we’re resorting to a simplistic “agree or disagree” framework for this discussion.

Allow me to speak personally for a moment. I embraced the Reformed world and life view 25 years ago because of the enormous gifts within this tradition. Through the 1960s to the 1990s, the Reformed tradition made significant contributions to important public conversations about the common good because of our commitment to the mind, to all of God’s creation, and to a posture of hopeful humility.

Being Reformed means rejecting anti-intellectualism. We have pursued education at the highest levels and as broadly as possible because we recognize the biblical call to worship the Lord with our minds. We embrace a spirituality of learning that seeks to bring the world of ideas under the lordship of Christ.

To be Reformed also means a robust embrace of God’s very good and very diverse – creation. We do not construct false dilemmas: between the material or the spiritual, the eternal or the temporal, creation or redemption. We are not dualistic or otherworldly but deeply and joyfully holistic, even earthy. We are a community, when presented with tough realities, that does not try to hide behind “spirituality” or over-simplification.

GOD’S SYMPHONY OF GRACE

We are hopefully humble because we are secure in God’s covenantal embrace. We know God’s enduring love which enables us to face the world’s complexity and challenges with hope, humbly knowing that we, though forgiven, are also part of the problem. We know that sin is only a minor note in the major key of God’s symphony of grace. In the hardest of times, we stake our lives on our assurance that everything good in creation and in the life of the mind is the result of God’s loving initiative. We live in hope that God will faithfully bring all things to his kingdom of shalom. This has given us a hopeful and humble posture in our Father’s world, even when the darkness has been overwhelming.

We are the Christians, equipped with God’s gifts, who now must engage a question like human sexuality without resorting to clichés, fear or scapegoating. We have a history as Reformed Christians that predisposes us to recognize that there are numerous reasons why this topic of human sexuality is before us today. This isn’t fundamentally about individual choices for sin or holiness. Life in North America (including our ways of being church) over the last 50 years produces this question. We can’t avoid it without withdrawing from the world we live in.

We are primarily facing, therefore, an opportunity. It is time for us to use our gifts again: to graciously bring our academic rigor to bear on the complexity of God’s creation with a humble confidence in God’s faithfulness. God is with us – even as we wade through the many factors (scientific, political, legal, generational, etc.) distorting all of life today. To simply “agree” or “disagree” is an injustice to the importance of this question. It is also a lack of love for the countless people for whom this is precisely not an “issue,” it’s their lives.

ALL GOD’S CHILDREN

I’ve loved CC for years, and now my 1-year-old enjoys pointing to all of the pictures. This first year of motherhood has me reflecting on our identity as children of God; I thought I’d share one such reflection. . . .

I like to pray before falling asleep. To have the contents of my day spill out in full sentences, meandering phrases or the wordless groans of Romans. It’s not always intentional, and it always involves drifting off to sleep, but it’s there. This reliable, safe emptying.

Each night before I put my baby in his bed, we rock back and forth, back and forth. When he was tiny, we’d spend the better part of an hour nursing, and I’d carefully lay him down in his crib. Now that he’s older, we read a story, nurse and, lately, he begins an entirely new sort of winding down. In the darkness, by the light of the crack underneath the door, an acrobatic routine takes place. There’s rolling from side to side, tipping backwards, stretching arms, kicking legs. There’s fussing, crying, flailing, settling. Arms reach again for my shirt, my arms, my face. Fingers go in noses (not always their own). There’s quiet breathing, deep sighs. Unable to see each other but sure of each other’s presence.

All the while we rock back and forth, back and forth. The pace and song vary. Somehow, time and time again, the little body on my lap finds a way to drowsy.

And as he spills out the contents of his day, I smile in the shadows, knowing that soon I’ll be doing the same.

Katie Bauer
Waterloo, Ont.

WHAT SHALL WE THEN PRINT?

What does it mean to seek unity in Christ, in the context of the Christian Reformed Church’s Human Sexuality Report, in the pages of Christian Courier? As Editor, I think about that question a lot. I wonder, in particular, if you as a reader come to these pages with your mind already made up or not. To paraphrase Francis Schaeffer, what shall we then print?

A call to use the gifts of the Reformed tradition by Mike Wagenman (left).

Advice from two women who know what it’s like to sit in a pew while LGBTQ (pages 6-7): “Stop trying to win arguments; try to understand each other instead.”

A summary of the many Overtures from across North American churches in response to the CRC Human Sexuality Report, coming in our next issue. A forthcoming news report on what’s happening in the Presbyterian Church of Canada this summer.

The history of how the United Church in Canada has dealt with this issue, also in an upcoming issue. And much more! My goal is to bring a few fresh angles and perspectives to CC, ones that you have perhaps not considered. Your respectful feedback is always welcome at editor@christiancourier.ca.

PANDEMIC BABY CLUB

Congratulations to CC columnist Lloyd Rang and his wife Keerthana on the safe arrival of their daughter Anika on March 22! “Anika is a girl’s name in both of our cultures – Dutch and Tamil,” Lloyd says. “Anika means grace in Dutch and graceful in Sanskrit.” Praise the Lord for the gift of new life!
‘DON’T LEAVE YOUR FAITH BEHIND’

New YouTube channel offers hope and encouragement for Christians in the LGBTQ community. | Angela Reitsma Bick

Joey and Dana Hulst still attend the Christian Reformed church they grew up in.

CC: You describe yourselves as “two white, American, millennial, gay and bi Christian women.” Yet your first Car Chats video is about vegetarian tacos, your favourite Harry Potter characters, music, pet peeves, personal quirks. Why did you begin your channel like that?

Joey: I really wanted to bring it down to the most basic human level. Our channel might be a good resource for people who have never really met a gay or bi person before, so we wanted to make ourselves known as not just “the gay and bi people” but you have to face who we are – Harry Potter nerds, people who like being outside in nature – those very human parts of ourselves.

Why did you start a YouTube channel?

Dana: We wanted to be two more Christian LGBTQ voices. There aren’t many out there. When I was starting to question my sexuality, I did a lot of reading and listening to podcasts and watching YouTube videos, and this is definitely a gap. I would love to use my experience to be an example of hope and encouragement for Christians in the LGBTQ community to know that you don’t have to leave your faith behind.

I really question if the Christians around me love me.

Did you come across LGBTQ people who have left the church?

Dana: Yes, especially on YouTube, the world is pretty secular. There are some voices of those who grew up in the church and in conservative environments, but it’s almost always talked about as, “Thank goodness I left that behind; that was a terrible part of my life.” Which is really sad.

What has your experience of being gay in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) been like?

Joey: Our experience was shaped by silence. We were spared from the fire-and-brimstone, “homosexuals are going to hell” rhetoric, which is a blessing, but it’s still fascinating how much can be communicated through silence. Before I was out, I dated a woman for a long time. When I finally started to come out, I had major anxiety about going to church with her because I was afraid people would ask me who she was, and I’d be forced to either lie or face the potential backlash. It’s disturbing that I felt safer lying to the people around me than to be openly out in my church.

Dana: I’ve never been fully out at church. It’s almost like my identity as a bi person doesn’t exist at church. That’s really not how it should be. We’re taught we should bring our whole selves to church, that’s what makes the church beautiful, but I’ve never felt comfortable doing that.

Reformed pastor and gay Christian journalist Jeff Chu published a memoir called Does Jesus Really Love Me? If you wrote a book, what title would summarize your experience?

Joey: Mine would be Do Christians really love me? I never question Jesus’ love in my life, and I never question my love for Jesus. But I really question if the Christians around me love me and if they want to know and accept my full self.

Dana: Mine would be more similar to Jeff Chu’s. Did God really make me good? Or Why did God make me this way? I didn’t feel like Jesus didn’t love me, but it was more about the message I received from the faith community around me, in hushed tones, with such a degree of seriousness, that it made me feel ashamed, like there was something wrong with me.

Joey: In church, it’s always presented as an “other.” It was assumed that LGBTQ people aren’t here with us. So when you are there, how does that work?! Dana: “They” are on another planet!

Joey: But of course, that’s not true, there are many lovely LGBTQ people in our churches, ourselves included.

You mentioned serious voices and hushed tones. Why is this conversation always so weighted, so heavy-feeling?

Dana: Such a good question. It’s heavy for us too! In our most recent video, I caught myself saying “discussion” instead of “conversation” about being LGBTQ” and I thought, why am I saying “discussion”? Because you’re preparing yourself to enter these conversations about this very serious, controversial thing.

Joey: It’s being approached from two completely different perspectives – for us, it’s just a part of who we are. But then people who are completely unfamiliar and have no conception of LGBTQ people in the world, they talk about it differently.

To get back to your first question, that is also why we wanted to show our goofy & lighthearted sides, because it’s equally as much a part of us as our sexuality. We are out here living full and joyous lives; we’re not to be pitied, we’re not to be scoured; we’re having a great time.

Tell me about your grandma.

Dana: She was an ally before we even came out, so she was an incredibly safe person to come out to.

Joey: Coming out to my grandma is one of my favourite memories of my life so far. We were at a little breakfast spot, and when I started coming out, I immediately started crying. Her love for me was so evident – she was leaning forward over this massive table; she expressed her love for me, how she was so proud of me, she put her hands on my face. There are very few minutes in my life that I have felt as loved as I did at that moment.

Dana: My coming out story to my grandma is also lovely, also a life highlight. I experienced God very clearly in that moment. She jumped out of her chair to stand and if they want to know and accept my full self.

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Tell me about your grandma.

Dana: She was an ally before we even came out, so she was an incredibly safe person to come out to.

Joey: Coming out to my grandma is one of my favourite memories of my life so far. We were at a little breakfast spot, and when I started coming out, I immediately started crying. Her love for me was so evident – she was leaning forward over this massive table; she expressed her love for me, how she was so proud of me, she put her hands on my face. There are very few minutes in my life that I have felt as loved as I did at that moment.

Dana: My coming out story to my grandma is also lovely, also a life highlight. I experienced God very clearly in that moment. She jumped out of her chair to stand

Reframing the Side A vs. Side B Debate

Homophobia in Christian Hip Hop

Gay Girl(s), Good God: A Book Review

Our Counseling Experiences

Car Chat topics range from Christian hip hop to the CRC’s Human Sexuality Report.
up and give me a hug, right away telling me how much she loved me and saying, “Tell me your story.” Now she sends our Car Chats channel to everyone she knows!

Where do you see God’s goodness in your life?

Joey: As humans we experience God’s goodness on different levels. My journey of identifying as gay was a very hard period of life, and although I held God close and nothing in my faith ever wavered, it was like the Psalmist-crying-out-to-God type of period. It was hard and necessary and good work, and I see God’s goodness through that whole process, and the way I was shielded from many harmful things, and the ways I received such love from the people in my life. Reflecting on where I am now – I’m able to more clearly see God’s goodness in every level of my life because I’m not spending all my mental, emotional and physical energy in trying to figure myself out; instead, I say, this is who I am, I love who I am, and now let me go follow Jesus in all these areas of my life. I feel the goodness of God in who God created me to be.

Dana: There’s so much joy in living authentically. To not have to feel like you have to hide a part of yourself from others. To receive others’ love and to know that you’re worthy of receiving others’ love and God’s love is such a good feeling.

The recommendation in 1973, to be “more accepting of homosexuals,” was made over 20 years before I was born. I felt none of that in the church growing up.

What was your response to the Human Sexuality Report going to the CRC Synod?

Joey: I don’t want to disparage the authors of the report or minimize their work, but the report is massive and yet the stories of LGBTQ people and their experiences are captured in these very short vignettes that don’t read authentically. None of those stories felt like me. Themes in those stories are very troubling to me – like suddenly feeling fulfilled in a church community and not needing to pursue a same-sex relationship anymore. They definitely do a good job of saying “ex-gay is not good” but at the same time some of those stories give those vibes of that type of experience. A CRC person reading this report might say, “Ok, that’s great, the gay and trans and bi people know what to do now; their problems can be solved.” That’s not a fair representation of who we are and what we’re asking from the church community. It didn’t feel up to the intellectual rigour that is part of what we love about the CRC.

Dana: It felt like they were trying to capture solutions but they do not capture the struggle or the hurt or the pain that [the report] will cause. I didn’t find myself in the report though it’s supposedly about me.

Joey: I don’t want to distrust those stories either, but they were too short for me to truly feel their journey.

Dana: For the report more broadly, they quoted something from the 1973 report – “We need to be accepting of homosexuals; they should be able to be their full authentic selves, extended the same compassion that we love and to know that you’re worthy of receiving others’ love and God’s love is such a good feeling.

What do you want members of the CRC to consider as this report goes to Synod?

Joey: There’s so much in there, and they tried to solve all the questions. They barely scratched the surface. When it gets to us, we felt like, “Ok, I guess you figured us out in 30 pages?” We don’t feel like we were included in this report that was supposedly about us, and that should be a really big red flag as Synod moves to make decisions based on this report.

Dana: I have more overarching concerns about the future of the CRC with this report. It feels already like our age group is not well represented. Most of the people our age at our church have already left; it feels that this report, for the future of the CRC, would not be a good move. They’ll lose a lot of LGBTQ people, allies, families.

In your videos you mention that your parents are non-affirming, but that you’re all willing to do what it takes to stay together. Can Christians in general, or members of the CRC in particular during this contentious time, learn anything from this dynamic between you & your parents?

Joey: I love how you framed that. There are lessons to be learned here. Sometimes the dynamic with our family is hard. But at the same time, it is so characterized by love. The love that we have for our parents enables us to say, we respect you, where you’re at, and we’re not going to try and force you to be somewhere you’re not. We’re not trying to drag you along or magically make you be on our level of understanding. That’s not how life works.

Dana: The reason our relationship works is because it’s mutual. It’s not just Joey and I committed to loving our parents; our parents love us so deeply and they’re not willing to give that up either. It’s all of us coming together and realizing that we’re not going to give up our relationships. As long as everyone agrees to that, you can make it work. That doesn’t mean it won’t be uncomfortable, but you work through it together. It can be an example to disagreeing parties. Isn’t that what love calls us to do? Move into difficult places despite our differences.

If you could give a message to everyone in the Reformed community, what would it be?

Dana: Treat LGBTQ people as people, not issues. We’re real people not theoretical concepts.

Joey: We are trying to follow Jesus just as you are! Meet us on that level. We also are people of faith who are learning about Jesus, wanting to grow closer in relationship with God, just like you are. Stop trying to win arguments – try to understand each other instead.

Are there resources you’d recommend for LGBTQ Christians or their families?

Dana: God and the Gay Christian by Matthew Vines and Torn by Justin Lee.

Joey: Torn was the starting point for me. Brownson’s Bible, Gender, Sexuality – that’s the deep dive; it was really helpful. Make sure that your church library has both perspectives; it’s important for people to understand that there are multiple perspectives; don’t pretend an affirming perspective doesn’t exist. Have a member of your congregation lead a support group; make yourself known as an ally, for family members of LGBTQ people, both affirming and non-affirming, just a space to talk about questions. If churches want to be open, create those groups inside your church. Your silence will speak loudly. Unless you’re intentionally countering that silence with openness at least to talking about it, then LGBTQ people are going to know where you stand.

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USHERING IN CHANGE

Because of the First Easter, the behaviours of the followers of the one true God changed dramatically. The gospel was thrown wide open to people of every nation. Eating habits began to differ. Long standing practices such as circumcision and sacrifice were given flexibility. For a first century resident in Jerusalem it would have felt like the entire religious structure was rendered apart, not just the temple curtain on Good Friday. That’s what change often does.

So why is it that, when our religious behaviours/structures change, the Christians in the walls of our churches get nervous? Shouldn’t we be used to it by now?

Truth be told, when I peer over the landscape of local churches across Canada, I see an all too common practice. Churches pray for, dream, and plan for change in the name of Godly, Holy Spirit-infused progress. Reports are written and plans made. They are presented to councils and given time at congregational meetings. By all accounts, it seems like the Spirit has been at work.

And then, the change that God had been ushering in somehow is quieted. Things return to “normal,” and the idea is shelved.

It’s why I believe that one of the best things any leader in a church can do is simply find the historical reports that have lain on a shelf and gotten dusty, and then ask the question, “Why are we not doing this?” Secondly, leaders must then press into the change in a similar way to Hilkiah finding the Book of the Law in 2 Kings 22.

The first part of this, discovery, happens ALL the time. But the second part, dealing with actual change, happens only sometimes. Let me encourage your church to begin a process of discovery and evaluation of those things if you have not done so recently.

First, because it’s important in this era of our broader culture, and second, because we believe God told us to, in a Hezekiah sort of way.

The gospel remains. The good news of Jesus Christ through a Reformed lens is still our central thrust. But how we need to change to best execute His plan demands a flexible spirit within us. Maybe the late David Bowie said it right when he sang the song you still hear at Major League baseball parks: “Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes . . . Turn and face the strange Ch-ch-ch-changes.”

GLOCAL MISSION SUMMIT

Be a witness for Christ in your community

Cassie Westrate, Resonate Global Mission

are you ready to reimagine evangelism and discipleship in a world changed by COVID? Resonate Global Mission invites you to attend the virtual Glocal Mission Summit, May 13-15, 2021, to share and learn how God is working in local communities throughout the globe.

“I think everyone is tired of navigating all of the challenges COVID has brought about . . . we really need encouragement to know what God is up to around the world. This is an opportunity to hear some encouraging stories that are rooted in, or connected to, the Christian Reformed Church,” said Kevin DeRaaf, acting director of Resonate in Canada.

The Glocal Mission Summit is free to participate in and features a variety of plenary speakers, panels, table conversations, and breakout sessions with mission leaders from around the world. This year’s theme, “On the Road to Witness,” will explore Jesus’ call in Acts 1:8 to be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Everyone is welcome to participate, and while the summit is virtual, it is not “just another Zoom meeting.” There will be opportunities for participants to ask questions, share their own stories and experiences, and meet and interact with other participants. The sessions will also be quick and spread out.

“In this time of disconnect, the Glocal Mission Summit is a way to bring CRC folks together to connect,” said DeRaaf. “We really see this as a way to serve the church and the denomination. I think it’s going to be a real gift for people.”

Participants will be able to participate in one of 19 break-out sessions covering a variety of topics, including “Evangelism for Everyone: It’s not the 80s Anymore,” “Discipling and Mentoring Generation Z,” and “Reimagining Church: Forward Thinking in our Present COVID Reality.”

“We really want this to be a conference that sparks the missional imagination in those who participate,” said DeRaaf. “People will experience the beautiful diversity in the CRC. God is at work in the denomination.”

Blessings in troubling times

Christians in Mexico have been experiencing many of the same struggles we’ve faced here in Canada for the last year. Funerals without family members or friends present. Loss of jobs. Increased time spent at home.

Still, Maria has found a silver lining with help from ReFrame Ministries.

“One of the good things about this time of confinement has been the messages and reflections that we’ve been listening to every day. We’re so thankful to God for the blessing you’ve been to us and to our church.”

“Es una bendición,” Maria shared with ReFrame’s Spanish ministry team. “It’s a blessing.”
HOPE BORN OF GRIEF

Brian Walsh

ALL OF MY DEAD CAME FLOODING BACK TO ME. The friends, the suicides, the murders, the babies, family members, the old and the much too young. They all came flooding back as I listened to Carolyn Arends singing “To Cry for You.”

Blessed are the ones who weep / ‘Cause every tear is proof / Of ties that bind so strong and deep / That death cannot undo / So it is my honour to cry for you.

With Recognition, Carolyn Arends has produced a stunningly beautiful album, borne of grief and resonating so richly with the sorrow and anxiety that has such a hold on the world in the midst of this pandemic. If it is true that those who weep are blessed, then we are a blessed people indeed.

This is an album for a healing that begins in tears. So don’t be surprised if you find your eyes welling up as you listen closely. Arends lovingly strips away all superficial veneers, while musically and lyrically guiding us past our denials and distractions in order to face our sorrows, our debilitating pain. In “Pool of Tears,” the artist sings:

Pain is part of the deal / for as long as we’re here / But we’re not all alone in this, that much is clear / All of us sit by our own pool of tears.

I know, this sounds heavy, but in fact it is liberating. The burdens get lifted, they get lighter as you listen closely to this wonderful album. Even when she is singing about deep pain, you can almost hear the smile on her face. This album is so good for the soul, so cathartic, and so healing. The music is like a loving embrace.

In fact the most joyful song on the album is a bouncy tune about death. “Memento Mori” is a delightfully clever tune that invites us to face death with a smile on our face.

Memento Mori / Remember you will die / So live the story / You want to tell / Memento Mori / You only get one life / So don’t be sorry / Just live it well.

And in “Let love lead you home,” a song that could be an anthem for all hospital, retirement home and hospice chaplains, the artist tenderly sings:

When it’s time for you to leave / Gather all the love you’ve known / the love you gave, the love received / And let it lead you home / Oh, let love lead you home.

If I ever forget these words, I pray that someone will remind me on my deathbed.

With echoes of Leonard Cohen and Bruce Cockburn, and in duet with Amy Grant, Arends sings:

So I guess this is my song for all the ones / Who keep singing as the world comes undone / Like a broken hallelujah, their melodies soar / Till the world’s not quite so broken anymore / Yeah like a rumour of glory, our melodies soar / And the world’s not quite as hopeless anymore.

And isn’t that the calling of evocative, truth-telling and life-giving art? “God knows there’s injustice everywhere/But the music will not go away.”

Music for healing. Music in the face of the pain, the injustice. Music that awakens hope anew.

But this is not music as self-medication. This is not a music to numb the pain, or to simply give us a few moments of relief while the malady persists. On the other side of this pandemic there is no going back to “normal.” You see what we call normal’s a disaster / so now I just want to become… / Maladjusted / Mal-adjusted / ‘Cause everything we trusted has gone bad / This dysfunction / Needs disruption / So let’s all get maladjusted in a world gone mad (Maladjusted).

Recalling a speech by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963, Arends knows that being well adjusted and easily accommodated to a broken world of such un-health and dysfunction is itself to make our peace with injustice, violence and oppression. This is an album about grief and death, but the artist refuses to grant the forces of death the first or last word.

Indeed, the last word on the album looks beyond death, beyond the shadow of this pandemic crisis, beyond this long night, to the dawn of resurrection. In the midst of our deep longing for embrace, for gathering together as families, churches, friends, face to face, Carolyn Arends closes Recognition with these words of hope:

‘Cause after this, the sun will be shining / ‘And all we missed, will come to us in a whole new light / And there we will never waste / The sweet gift of a warm embrace / When at last we are face to face / After this

Recognition is a complete album. This is not a mere collection of songs, but a well-curated meditation on our times. Judicious employment of a horn section, a string quartet and gospel back-up singers adds texture and depth to the very fine ensemble of musicians on this album. Buy it. Get a couple of copies as gifts for your minister and chaplain friends. And begin by listening to the whole work in one sitting. It did my soul an immense lot of good. I think it will for you as well.

SAYING GOODNIGHT WITH LOVE AND IMAGINATION

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

BEFORE HIS DEATH IN 2019, Lee Bennett Hopkins, renowned children’s poet, anthologist, and author of more than one hundred books, compiled this selection of gentle, imaginative goodnight poems by 13 poets. A child’s bed, pillow, blanket, rocking horse, book, and more are celebrated. Creatures like dogs are appreciated. Dreams are anticipated. Guardian angels are welcomed. The moon and stars bring joy.

Poems include contributions like Clock. Humorous, yet wistful, author Prince Redcloud anticipates how quickly children grow up:

“Tock tock / broken clock. / My tick is gone. / Tock tock. / No need to fix me. / There is time / to put / my tick / back in. / Maybe tomorrow. / I can wait. / So can you. / It takes a lot of / tick-tock / tick-tock / tick-tock — to grow.”

Hopkins’s contribution entitled Teddy Bear shares the thoughts of a much-loved stuffed animal and subtly shows how children need to feel loved and safe when falling asleep: “I have been / kissed, hugged / tossed, thrown / my clothes / are tattered / there are / knots in / my fur . . . / but / I don’t care. / I’m here for you / to snuggle into / as you / squeeze me tight / until / tomorrow’s / morning / light.”

Though recommended for children ages four to eight, this poetry collection, complemented by illustrator Jen Corace’s vivacious, bright artwork, will also be appreciated by a much younger audience.

RECOGNITION
Carolyn Arends
Bandcamp, 2021.
Available at shopcarolynarends.com

NING WISHES

Edited by Lee Bennett Hopkins
Illustrated by Jen Corace

SONYA VANDERVEEN FEDDEMA
Sonya is a freelance writer living in St Catharines, Ont.
ACCENTED ANTIThESIS

Peter Schuurman

“So long as you pick up and use Proverbs like a telephone book, you are most likely to get a wrong number.” – Calvin Seerveld

IF YOU DARE, CRACK OPEN THIS BOOK AND BE READY FOR A JOLT. It’s a book that strives to refresh the “literary verve and contentious bite” of scripture. It’s a call to get with the Holy Spirit in obedience to God’s creation ordinances, His Word for life, or ruin your life in a slide down to hell.

Reformational philosopher Seerveld is faithful to Proverbs insofar as he always presents us with a stark choice: following Woman Wisdom or Woman Stupidity, alias “Mistress of Hell.” Attending to the former means being on the “footpath of obeying the Lord of creation with praise and healing joy” that leads to shalom. Being seduced by the latter will land you like dead cattle hanging in the abattoir (photo included on page 27).

Seerveld repeats over and over that Proverbs is not sanctified Egyptian precepts to be understood as “oral one-liners,” “handy maxims” or “atomistic logia treating a miscellany of topics” to help us get ahead and be a success. As the subtitle says, the key is paragraphs: like poetry, they need to be understood in clustered sections, with irony, refrains, extended metaphors, and multiple, at times contrasting, voices.

This method proves that this Biblical book is not about advice for winning in life but about fear of the Lord, getting our lives straight before the face of God. Wisdom, insists Seerveld, is nothing less than a gift of the Holy Spirit, presented to us in Proverbs as a woman, perhaps because wisdom has a similar resourcefulness, “normally subtle, indirect, quietly persuasive, not calling attention to itself. Dare we call such delicate, piercing judicious, serviceable and nurturing discriminative activity, a particularly womanly trait?”

Wisdom is not technique, pious formula, cleverness, or speculative intelligence. Instead it’s “quasi-dramatic,” in fact a “consummate story-telling, roundabout, deferential, yet surprising way to bring God’s specific direction to bear on life problems.” We see this most clearly not in prophets, priests, or kings, but in a fourth office: the counsellor, the advisor of kings and queens, the wise man or woman.

Seerveld released his book on Revelation last year, and he released a new work on the Song of Songs in 2018, and there is more to come, Lord willing. This book is a collage of translations from the Hebrew, sermons, articles from the 1970s, recent meditations, prayers, illustrations, and even a hymn. It’s not quite a full commentary on the Biblical book, but it’s a stirring introduction to its stark binaries, placed in the context of the rest of Scripture, including the Newer Testament.

This guide is at once rich and austere. Rich in its “Reformatio-nally Christian reading,” because, like Proverbs, it addresses all of life, from politics to education to business in language that cuts to the heart of uncompromising obedience. Austere, because it recognizes “the whole web of wasteful stupidities we North Americans politely consume is ruining us as a people!” It commends a piety that eschews snowmobile thrills, fishing trips, Christmas presents for the kids, talk shows, moon landings, fast cars and chic dress. Indulgent people without “faith guts” are left with a spiritual “whoredom,” such that “every unfounded undermining word uttered will damn us to hell on the last day.”

When the second edition of this book comes out, I’d like to see lay people give the blurs on the back instead of the scholars. I can imagine comments like: “I’m missing God’s best. I forgot how arresting the Bible can be,” and “Reading this made me realize how distracted and confused my life had become. Repentance has become my sweetest song.”

Seerveld’s writing is spiritually electric for both scholars and lay people. Some of his work is intricate and thick, but some of it is ready for the street. What is wisdom? “Insight into doing what is right,” “when you genuinely, thoroughly know what God wants done, what is holy and true to the LORD,” and “act like Jesus.”

Read this book if you want to know what’s up, and what’s not, when you’re scared to try. Mostly, A Rhythm of Prayer is a book that Bessey prays will remind you that in the midst of this crazy, often disheartening, yet beautiful world, God is in control and there’s no prayer too crazy, too disheartening, or too beautiful that God doesn’t hear.

EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES OF PRAYER

Ashley Medendorp

WRITTEN FOR OUR CURRENT CULTURAL CONTEXT, Sarah Bessey’s Rhythm of Prayer isn’t just a nice neat book of prayers for you to pray, but rather a deep dive into the diverse world of praying. It breaks down what we think we know about prayer and helps construct a vast new understanding of all that it can be. Divided into three parts, Orientation, Disorientation, and Reorientation, Bessey has collected meditations that will lead you to feel distressed and comforted, lost and at home, tired and hopeful.

Dedicated to the late “Eshet Chayil, woman of valour” Rachel Held Evans, Bessey recruits a diverse group of friends and writers for this book, from poets Amena Brow and Kaitlin Currice to Spiritual Director Nish Weiseth and justice educator, activist, and minister Alicia T. Crosby. The collection covers prayers, liturgies, poems and reminders. “You are so loved. You are so loved. You are so loved.” Bessey reminds the reader that God’s love is not dependent on any one thing they are, or aren’t, whether they feel it or not.

This book doesn’t expect you to be in a “mountain top” experience or at peace with the world. Rather, the writers meet you when you’re wondering if God can hear you, when you’re struggling with forgiveness, whether you’re black or white, abled or disabled, found or lost, praying or not. There are prayers for when you’re curled up in your favourite sweats in front of a cozy fire and prayers for when you’re ready to shout at God in frustration.

A Rhythm of Prayer is not a book of prescribed prayers but rather a prescription to open our minds and hearts to the possibility that God hears us in more ways than we can imagine. In ways that we might’ve thought were forbidden. In ways that we’ve been too
MEET ME AT BOUNDARIES BLVD.

Learning to rest when the world is too much. | Sabrina T. Cherry

ONE YEAR AND ONE MONTH. Fifty-six weeks; 396 days; 9,504 hours. That’s roughly how long we’ve been deep in the COVID-19 pandemic. Depending on where you live this timeline may be longer or shorter. I still recall where I was when I received the news. I was co-leading an “alternative spring break” trip with a group of students in Atlanta. We’d only been at the shelter for a few days before the angst began to set in. As we cautiously watched the headlines and tried to retain some sense of normalcy, we had no idea what was ahead of us.

Thankfully, we made it back to our home campus safely. And as the days turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months, we settled into what would become our pandemic lives. I initially settled into what would become the nonexistent commute and increased time to be still. I never embraced the slower pace. I saw shifts in perspectives and noticed patience wane. I grieved. I also felt this verse deeply: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

The time for change is long overdue. How long have we been discussing discrimination, inclusivity and diversity? How long have scholars and practitioners written about, talked about, and preached about equity and justice? For how many decades have I been reading about health disparities, inequitable access to care, and the impact of racism on health, as well as health outcomes? Yes, there was and remains much work to do. Yes, we must all be involved in this work. But we also can’t do the work if we’re not here – literally. We can’t do the work if we’re sick and unhealthy and fatigued and run over and rundown. We can’t do it on empty. “Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only love can do that.” Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that. We can’t do it if we’re not here – literally. We can’t do the work if we’re not here – literally. We can’t do the work if we’re not here – literally.

By May, four of my family members had died – two under the age of 45 from COVID-19 and two from age-related illnesses. The news was no longer something that was happening “over there” but a very real thing that had hit my own backyard. While some friends became sick and recovered, others are still dealing with the persistent effects of “long-haul COVID” – ongoing side effects of the virus even after recovery. Last spring, our university students seemed increasingly irritated by the lack of immediate access to faculty members, and I had to guard my boundaries carefully, knowing I didn’t have the capacity to be all things to all people.

By June, I felt like I had reached my breaking point. The pandemic itself was one thing. Managing solitude and social isolation was challenging yet possible. But witnessing a disregard for human life was crippling. A blatant disregard for Black lives. A blatant disregard for elderly lives. A blatant disregard for immunocompromised lives. A blatant disregard for essential-worker lives. Violence, the politicization of wearing masks, and the death tolls weighed heavily on my heart.

The sad part is that I am not unfamiliar with such disregard – it’s something I have witnessed and experienced due to racism. I grew up in a small, rural community in South Carolina. I’ve known racism my entire life. I move about in particular ways because of this awareness. But 2020 brought a heightened sensitivity not only to racism but of the blatant and unapologetic violence toward marginalized communities. And one of the most challenging parts was the gross and utter denial, as well as justification, of these acts. Ahmaud Arbery: why was he there? Breonna Taylor: why was he in that neighborhood? George Floyd: he was less than a model citizen.

THE WEARINESS OF THE WORLD

We were never meant to be all things to all people. We were never meant to be everywhere for everyone. Our voices are not able to reach every single group within every single sphere. There is fulfillment and delight in knowing where we end and someone else begins. We were never meant to be all things to all people. We were never meant to be everywhere for everyone. Our voices are not able to reach every single group within every single sphere. There is fulfillment and delight in knowing where we end and someone else begins.

By fall of 2020, I was desperate to find new rhythms to help me manage my hurt, anger, disbelief and confusion, while committing to finding my lane within a new wave of justice work. I dove into writing. I began to pursue creative outlets with abandon. I embraced and cultivated alternative forms of being in community. I gained a new appreciation for family and safe ways to gather. And … I rested.

Over the past year, I have learned and watched. I have witnessed fatigue set in and health ignored. I felt the sentiments of hardened hearts and hatred creeping into places they didn’t previously reside. I saw shifts in perspectives and noticed patience wane. I grieved. I also felt this verse deeply: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

Yes, the time for change is long overdue. How long have we been discussing discrimination, inclusivity and diversity? How long have scholars and practitioners written about, talked about, and preached about equity and justice? For how many decades have I been reading about health disparities, inequitable access to care, and the impact of racism on health, as well as health outcomes? Yes, there was and remains much work to do. Yes, we must all be involved in this work. But we also can’t do the work if we’re not here – literally. We can’t do it if we’re sick and unhealthy and fatigued and run over and rundown. We can’t do it on empty. “Darkness cannot drive out darkness,” as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said. “Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” What does it mean to inhibit the darkness, not to cultivate it, not to live in it? Again, I rested.

APPLICATION STORY

By the beginning of winter, requests to participate in panels and presentations and movie screenings abounded. The demands on my time outweighted anything I could reasonably accommodate. And then guilt set in. Should I volunteer for all of these events? Shouldn’t I show up and make my voice heard? Should I speak to these people or that group? I learned more often than not that the answer was a resounding “no.”

THE WEARINESS OF THE WORLD

We were never meant to be all things to all people. We were never meant to be everywhere for everyone. Our voices are not able to reach every single group within every single sphere. There is fulfillment and delight in knowing where we end and someone else begins.

So I embraced boundaries. Healthy boundaries. Transparent boundaries. Persistent...
boundaries. Pesky boundaries. Protective boundaries. I become ever more convinced that “no” is a complete sentence. It is indeed okay to change my mind about a previous commitment. One of my most important tasks is to steward my time and attention well. This stewardship further equips me to be where I truly need to be, to be there 100 percent, and to effectively reach those I’ve been called to reach.

In January, an angry mob stormed the U.S. capitol with “Jesus” signs and confederate flags. On the day of the riots, 61 people were arrested. At the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, more than 300 people were arrested at a single protest. To date, there have been over 300 people charged in relation to the riot at the capitol. News sources report that nearly 14,000 arrests have been made in connection with Black Lives Matter protests. Still, I rest.

In February, we celebrated Black History Month here in the U.S. But we also heard the verdict in the Daniel Prude case; we honoured Trayvon Martin’s birthday on Feb. 5; acknowledged the anniversary of the killing of Ahmaud Arbery on Feb. 23; and, as I write this piece, we are witnessing a rise in anti-Asian hatred and violence, both in Canada and the U.S.

HELPING OURSELVES

These events have left me weary. Hopeless. Tired. But I have learned and am learning that when I take a moment to retreat, I can also be recharged. And when I do, my work is more intentional, more fulfilling, and, with prayer, more significant. When I acknowledge that every area of my life needs boundaries, I can say no to all the “good” things as I am prepared for the God things.

For clergy, academics and justice-seekers, this last year can feel like a heavy load. It can feel like too much to bear. But then I remember that I was never, ever meant to bear it all. I can do what I am called to do. I can be discerning in my “yeses.” I can serve with purpose. And then I can retreat to Rest and Boundaries Boulevard, reminding myself this work doesn’t start or end with me.

I’d like to invite you over. Will you meet me – physically or virtually – and we can retreat to Rest and Boundaries Boulevard?

As the event was about to begin and it became clear that several hundred people would be attending, one of the participants exclaimed with delighted surprise that so many Canadians, Christians, and Christian leaders would come together to pray for Hong Kong.

Rev. Stephen Kendall, President of the Canadian Council of Churches, drew our attention to the 2018 consensus statement of the CCC, Principles of Peace. This document suggests that where there are right relationships, there is peace, and right relationships are grounded in justice. Inner peace is a gift from Jesus himself, and peace is also the mission of God’s people. It concludes that, “Peace is a dynamic state of well-being and harmony – right relationships among people and nature where there is no fear. Nothing and no one is excluded from God’s vision of peace; it includes all nations, cultures, and peoples, the whole inhabited Earth, indeed the whole cosmos.”

The service acknowledged that there are many Canadians in Hong Kong, and some will want to come to Canada. Our Christian responsibility will be to welcome them with care and hospitality, being particularly aware of the need to stand against anti-Asian racism. We were encouraged to pray about the anticipated massive migration out of Hong Kong, to pray for those who leave and for those who remain, and to pray for the welfare of all the citizens, no matter their political positions. Much more may be required of the churches of Canada as people from Hong Kong begin to land on our shores.

PRAYERS FOR HONG KONG

Reflected on peace and right relationships. | Amanda Currie

“CANADA AND CANADIANS HAVE deep ties with Hong Kong. We feel the pain and suffering and uncertainty many people in Hong Kong are experiencing now. The gospel calls us to grieve with those who grieve, to bear witness to the pain and needs of others, to show solidarity with and hospitality to the needy, and to lift up and attend to their spiritual needs.”

On March 21, I was privileged to participate in “A Cross-Canada Day of Prayer for Hong Kong.” The words above were printed in the service bulletin. Initiated by the Mustard Seeds Hong Kong Concern Group and organized by The Canadian Council of Churches, the prayer service brought together Christians from a broad spectrum of churches. While the issues in Hong Kong are deeply political (with China continuing to exert its influence) the service did not have a political agenda or intent. It was a pastoral response to a complex situation as Canadian Christians gathered online to pray with and for our siblings in Hong Kong who are struggling, as well as with Canadians who have connections with or family living there.

“There is grief and fear in Hong Kong, O God, but there is also desire for love, peace, and justice,” we prayed. “Bring your comfort and wisdom. Bring your guidance and Spirit, that we may all hold each other up and hear the needs expressed for livelihood, for safety, for peace, for reconciliation, for freedom, for rights, for justice.” We reflected on the peaceful vision from the Prophet Isaiah (11:6) in which “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.”
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RETURN TO NORMAL

 Riopelle exhibit of bronzes and canvases hidden for months behind a digital interface; pixelated representations longing for in-person encounter.

 Surprise government opening of museums with limited time slots available. Join a cohort of the free walking those familiar, high-ceilinged rooms.

 Art gallery visit, not as imagined. Running late with a warning in mind: “Arrive 15 minutes early or lose your visit.”

 Rush through revolving doors and up the sweeping staircase. Sweaty behind a mask, fogged glasses, more bodies than imagined. Too many. The discomfort of proximity.

 Wander distractedly past expansive landscapes with artist’s trademark palette knife strokes; walk hesitatingly around bronze owls both intricate and rough.

 Escape, finally, to a tranquil basement gallery, quiet with the works of Manuel Mathieu. Solitude with its turquoise framing, negative space of whiteness, and a reclined, healing figure.

 Ouroboros, an expansive installation of hung fabric – layered and sanged. Fragile tunnel inviting us to a future not yet conceived or given.

 Our longed-for return to normal is by halting, awkward steps. >

Roland De Vries
Roland teaches at The Presbyterian College, Montreal. He likes to explore culture and play with words.

This is “Ouroboros” by Manuel Mathieu, seen by Roland while at the Riopelle Exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal.

THEY, WE: POST-EASTER POETRY

 Katie Munnik | katiemunnik@yahoo.ca

 Katie is an Ottawa writer living in Cardiff with her spouse and three growing children. You can also find Katie on twitter @messy_table.

 EVERY TWO WEEKS OR SO, a friend organizes poets. She is living with cancer, and the poets were an idea to keep social during what can only be classed as difficult days.

 The poets used to be in the habit of meeting in person once a month for a reading and open mic session hosted by a small press at the local arts centre, followed by a social spell in the café bar downstairs. I discovered the poets when I first moved to town five years ago, and they were a great first step in feeling at home in a new place. With a squat and a little shuffle, they made space for me and my prose, and I started to put down roots. Now, with the pandemic and constantly changing lockdown regulations and the friend’s cancer added to the mix, we needed a new habit. Something to connect us and keep us going.

 A NATIONAL POEM?

 The Zoom invitation arrives with a theme. This month, it was Poets Laureate, which meant an inevitable flood of British and American voices. The position of British Poet Laureate dates back to 1668 when John Dryden was appointed. The American role began in 1937 with Joseph Auslander. Canada came late to the party in 2002 with the selection of George Bowering, so there are not so many voices or poets to choose among, but I was determined. I take every opportunity I can to include CanLit.

 As well as sharing good verse, we wanted to look at the role and motivations of a poet laureate as well as the public’s expectations about such a role. Is the position an honour given to an established poet or should the poet feel responsibility to write about events of national significance? What would a national poem be? There are likely as many answers to these sorts of questions are there are poets, let alone poets laureate, which meant we had a good conversation about the whole issue.

 The poem I chose was by Georgette Leblanc, Poet Laureate 2018-2019. Her poem untitled – fieldnotes commemorates the first anniversary of the death of Gord Downie, lead singer and lyricist for The Tragically Hip. When Downie shared news of his terminal brain tumour, the news shuddered through Canada. That summer, the band toured Canada to support Man Machine Poem, their 13th studio album, and the final concert was broadcast and streamed live by the CBC to an estimated audience of 11.7 million people. Gord Downie died in 2017 at the age of 53.

 Leblanc’s poem touches on the grief of a country mourning its poet. She writes: “this year the first year they, we told your story . . .” When I first read the poem, I loved that broken pronoun they, we. It is descriptive, inclusive and raw, expressive a collective grief. But this is the translation; Leblanc originally wrote the poem in French, before translating it herself. The French version is moving in a different way. “cette année la première année que j’avons raconté ton histoire . . . “ Here, the pronoun is singular, but the verb conjugation plural. J’avons is grammatically wrong, but poetically precise. I becomes we, singular becomes plural. When we tell stories of absence, grief and loss, we break down loneliness and the community grows wider.

 The earliest church in those first post-Easter days knew loneliness and the community that sustained and strengthened them together. They met together in sheltered places, and Jesus appeared among them. I hope, that after this year of keeping apart and isolation, we can lean together to share our griefs and find new connections and mutual strength to draw us into tomorrow.

 This is “Ouroboros” by Manuel Mathieu, seen by Roland while at the Riopelle Exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal.

Columns

@ChrCourier ChrCourier
EULOGY FOR A CREEK

WE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO SPELL IT. Was it Bar Creek, Bahr Creek or Barr Creek? We may not have known the name, but we knew how to enjoy it.

What I call the South Branch of the Bar Creek ran through the backyards of people living on Wisconsin Avenue and Center Street in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, when I was a kid. It must have been straightened at some time because it ran pretty well in a line from Second Street to Main Street. Just before Main Street it entered a tunnel behind Les-n-Les’ Garage and Evanoff’s Variety Store. It was enclosed (buried) as it ran beneath Main Street and the Cal-Dutch Canning Factory property before emerging into the open again near the “old stink pond.” From there it meandered until it joined the North Branch near what we called the “septic tank,” the waste water disposal site for the village.

But back to the South Branch. At the “top” it seemed to rise out of a field just west of Second Street. It wasn’t fed by a crystal-clear spring with watercress beds and native brook trout. It was more of a wish than a creek, but snowmelt, rain and some sort of natural drainage and seepage caused it to flow at times.

For us kids, that creek was a playground. Tom Brassier, Jim Jensen, the VerGowes and the Gesches – to name but a few – conducted adventures along the creek. Little children sometimes put a string and a hook on a willow and tried fishing there. . . when it contained water.

That some spawning white suckers from Lake Michigan had made it up the creek, then made a long underground trip through the culverts and were hovering in the water of “our” creek. Wouldn’t it be wonderful, we thought to ourselves, if some pike would come up from the lake to our creek? This was before the salmon and trout fishery in Lake Michigan was established in the 1960s.

A favourite spot of ours was one low spot where that straightened creek widened into a sort of marsh. Could there be muskrats there? Yes, sometimes. Jim Jensen got some #1 traps and we tried to catch some, to no avail. I thought I once saw a mink track in the snow in that marsh. There were marshy plants, and rabbits in the long grass for us to hunt with stones, clubs and BB guns.

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One year we went down to Evanoff’s and found – to our delight –

food insecurity as a priority. It took until 2019 to see the broad outlines of a food policy and a budget of $134 million. The four goals are positive:

Help Canadian communities access healthy food;

Make Canadian food the top choice at home and abroad;

Support food security in northern and Indigenous communities; and

Reduce food waste.

The targets are long-term: “By 2030, end hunger and ensure all have access to safe foods.”

By 2030, halve food waste at the retail and consumer levels, and reduce waste along the food chain.”

These align with the global Sustainable Development Goals. Among specific programs are a Food Waste Reduction Challenge to develop innovative ways to reduce food waste ($20 million) and Local Food Security Initiatives ($50 million). A National Advisory Council, announced in 2019, held its first meeting in March 2021.

SHORTAGES AND WASTE

By contrast the Agri-food Economic Strategy gets more attention and much bigger budgets. The focus on export-oriented Canada wastes over 800 pounds of food per person per year.

TULIPS ARE POKING through the soil. My seed order has arrived. Even the thought of returning to the garden renews my spirit. Fresh, nutritious food during the summer and fall, with enough to share, is an extra blessing. Easy access to local, nutritious food should be true for far more people than it currently is.

I have written before about food insecurity, food waste and food policies in Canada. There has been some progress – but achingly slow. In other countries food issues cause riots and turf out leaders. Why is it such a low priority in Canada?

GOALS VS REALITY

In 2015 the mandate for the Minister of Agriculture included a national food policy, with

agri-food overshadows food security. Trade issues have dominated the political agenda. Now COVID has drawn attention to our over-reliance on global supply chains and the situation of foreign workers in the agriculture sector. Some see agri-food industry goals, food security and food waste reduction as compatible goals, but others see these as competing or contradictory paths forward. The tensions in public policy are similar to spending billions in subsidies to fossil fuel industries and taking small steps toward clean energy. Perhaps the shift occurring in energy policy will also lead to a healthier balance in food policy.

A higher level of urgency is warranted. While one out of eight families struggle to put nutritious food on their tables and 800,000 people visit foodbanks every month, Canada wastes over 800 pounds of food per person per year, at an estimated cost of $31 billion. This is a food system in need of major repair. In addition, food waste contributes to greenhouse gases. If global food waste was a country, it would have the third highest carbon footprint, only behind the U.S. and China, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization. Canada is one of the most wasteful countries.

There’s a win-win opportunity here. COVID has increased public interest in growing and eating healthy foods. Reducing food waste, improving access to good food for everyone, and addressing harmful emissions is an achievable goal. It requires action in kitchens, fields, food factories and public policies that shape our food choices. Let’s get our act together in Canada.

The problem with the creek was that in years of high snowmelt or heavy showers it sometimes went over its banks and flooded parts of some back lawns. That’s when someone proposed a “solution.” Why not simply put the creek in a huge underground culvert and connect it to its existing tunnel under Main Street? Said and done.

That also meant that the land to the west of Second Street could be developed. Sure enough, a couple of bungalows were built right over the headwaters of the creek. Just put the creek into culverts and backfill. Ergo: a new building lot.

And so it goes. Whenever I visit Cedar Grove, Wisconsin now, I look with nostalgia at the route of “our” creek, now made safe for lawns. The children? Well, they can go to rec centres, pools and playgrounds, developed by the village.

The end of that part of Bar Creek. Accomplished and delivered. Said and done. Today’s children don’t even know about it to lament its passing.
A STRANGE SOUND GREETED ME as I stepped out the back door the other day. I paused for a second to determine its source. Birds! Hundreds of birds sat in our big maple trees, singing joyfully. No robins yet, but I hadn’t heard such giddy celebration in months.

Under sunny skies a southern breeze ushered in double digit temperatures for the first time in 2021. “I’m going for a motorbike ride,” said Jack.

I opened the car door and Norton jumped in. “We’re going to the dog park,” I said with a smile. This, too, is spring in Ontario – endless clean up and yard work, hopefully done before the first lawn mowing begins.

RENDER TO CAESAR
My mood sank further as I passed my office door and caught sight of the stacks of paper on my desk. Another harbinger of spring – tax time is on the horizon. My books are up to date, but I dread preparing year end statements, gathering receipts and making my files presentable for the accountant. Then comes the day of reckoning, when the bottom line has been calculated and we have to pay the piper.

REMEMBERING
Five years ago, I started writing this monthly column. The physical health of our younger daughters was top of mind, as the summer of 2016 was particularly challenging with a middle-of-the-night helicopter ride for Janneke from Parry Sound to McMaster Hospital and a less dramatic but still serious visit for Rachel at McMaster four weeks later.

Five years later, we are a bit older. I did not imagine a global pandemic or everyone clamoring along in my backyard to buy hand sanitizer and non-latex gloves. Now, the emotional health of the rest of the family is more concerning, as we learn to live with mental health challenges that have since developed.

MIND SHIFT
One way to describe how we change over time is with the word mindshift. As mother and primary caregiver of daughters with disabilities, my mind continues to shift in thinking about disability and normalcy. I’ve also learned to recognize that I don’t know much about living with disability; my insight is from the caregiver’s perspective, and I can’t pretend to know more.

GROW AS WE GO
And maybe that mind shift is part of the iterative process of living. We get up, go through our day, end our day, sleep a bit – and then start all over again. Events happen, relationships evolve, pandemics are declared, children are born, diagnoses are determined, hair is lost, weight is gained and we keep learning.

Make some time this month to open the windows and write a letter to your future self, even if it’s the three-months-from-now future self. You won’t regret it. “I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed” (Lam. 3:19-22a).
THE CHURCH OUTSIDE THE GATES

GATES OFFER PROTECTION. They also imprison. Gates are entrances and exits, transition points. Scripture celebrates the gates of God’s Kingdom. “Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in” (Ps. 24:7,9). Ezekiel envisioned God’s presence returning through the east temple gate (Ez. 43), and John in Revelation sees the 12 gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Jesus invites us to the narrow gate leading to Jerusalem (Rev. 21).

There are gatekeepers narrowing the gate, protecting those on the inside. They set danger and close the gates. Gatekeepers cut off the way. They are schismatic. In Acts the Jewish gate-watchers built just outside a city’s gates. When visitors arrived too late to enter the city, they could stay safe. St. Gertrude’s was the church outside the gates.

THE GATE

The beggar Lazarus lay outside the rich man’s gate (Luke 16:19-31). He is the only named character in any of Jesus’ parables. Lazarus was Greek for the Hebrew Eliezer, Abraham’s servant. Jewish tradition said that Eliezer of Damascus would still come to the people of Israel to see if they were practicing the hospitality of Abraham’s children in the world. Clearly the rich man failed to listen to Moses and the prophets. The gate was a barrier.

In Acts 3, Peter and John meet the lame man at the temple gate. He was not allowed in because of his deformity. Peter healed him in the name of Jesus and then entered with him into the temple. With this testimony Peter proclaims from Moses and the prophets the restoring healing. The gatekeepers tried to silence Peter and John. The gate remains until Acts 10. As Peter reflected on his vision, men from Cornelius are at the gate. They called out because as Gentiles they could not go into a Jewish house. Yet Peter invited them in and then went with them into the outsider Cornelius’ house. God pushes us through the gate.

OUTSIDE THE GATE

The writer of Hebrews addresses an exiled community and concludes, “And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore” (13:12-13). This gives the historical truth of the place of Jesus’ death a theological meaning and life application.

The writer reflects on the practices of the Day of Atonement where the animal bodies were brought outside the camp (Lev. 16) and maybe on the Moses tradition that the Tent of Meeting was outside the camp (Ex. 33). Jesus was killed outside the gate to atone for those outside. His followers meet him there to live as outsiders.

WE ARE AS MIST

C.S. Lewis observes that “man surrenders object after object, and finally himself, to nature in return for power.” Thinking about the world as a mechanism has extended to our bodies, which are also regarded as machines to be manipulated. Many are seeking technological ways to enhance their bodies in a philosophical movement called transhumanism. Even death is perceived as a technological problem that will eventually be conquered when our bodies can be replaced by more reliable machines. Behind this movement is a desire for control by using technology to enhance or change the body in any way desired.

The philosopher George Grant wrote that “most of us have forgotten our true status. We do not have complete control of ourselves; we are not independent of others; at birth and death we are helpless, and never at any time are we autonomous.” Grant reminds us that “we are creatures, dependent on God’s love, and not simply our own masters.” One of the by-products of the global pandemic has been a reminder that we are not in control. Despite all our advances, a microscopic virus brought the world to a standstill. In times such as these we are forced to acknowledge the plain truth described in James 4:13-15: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’ – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’”

I am thankful for technology, but regularly need to be reminded that I am not in control. As I learned in Zambia, even when we have our hands on the steering wheel, we don’t really have control. “As followers of Jesus Christ, living in this world - which some seek to control . . . we declare with joy and trust: Our world belongs to God!” (Contemporary Testimony, part 1). Thanks be to God – he is in control.

IN CONTROL?

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Derek is a professor at Calvin University where he teaches a capstone course on perspectives in computer science.

JUST OVER A YEAR AGO, I was traveling in a large, air-conditioned, four-wheel-drive vehicle over rough roads in rural Zambia. I was sitting securely in the passenger seat, comfortably watching the scenery and villages pass by, when suddenly the steering rod failed. The vehicle veered into a field next to the road and abruptly ground to a halt in the soft soil. We stumbled out into the intense afternoon sunshine. Unable to budge the vehicle, it did not take long before we felt vulnerable to the heat, sun, insects and thirst. The dirt road stretched for miles into the distance and we realized that we were no longer in control of our circumstances.

Living in the modern world can foster the illusion of being in control. We live in climate-controlled houses, which insulate us from the elements; we travel effortlessly across the country by road or by air; select any movie or show on demand, and order anything our hearts desire from our couches with a few clicks of a mouse or a simple Alexa voice command. Such conveniences can give us an illusion of control over our circumstances, sheltered from harm and able to summon whatever we need.

At the dawn of modernity, Francis Bacon talked about “putting nature to the rack” to subject it to our wishes. A common element of the engineering mindset is the desire to make the world controllable. The consequences of this mindset are a technological approach to nature, treating it like an elaborate mechanism to be manipulated. The result is that the world

GOING OUTSIDE

There is no fear outside because even the gates of Hades – death – cannot imprison these pilgrims (Matt. 16:18). They are protected by the gate and shepherd of the sheep as “they will come in and go out and find pasture” (John 10:9).

That’s the church – going outside the gate to Lazarus, the lame, the outsider, to Jesus, that all may be brought in.
PRAYING THE PSALMS

David T. Koyzis | dtkoyzis@gmail.com

David is a Global Scholar with Global Scholars Canada. He blogs about the Psalms at genevanspsalter.blogspot.com.

As a Young Man Living and studying in Minnesota, I accidentally stumbled upon a form of prayer extending back to the early church and into biblical times. I was browsing in the bookstore of Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul and found a red paper-bound volume titled The Daily Office, with a lengthy subtitle: “Matins and Vespers, Based on Traditional Liturgical Patterns, with Scripture Readings, Hymns, Canticles, Litanies, Collects and the Psalter, Designed for Private Devotion or Group Worship.” A compact book, it nevertheless had nearly 700 pages, packed with scripture, psalms, hymns and prayers organized around the church year. I purchased the book and began to pray according to the patterns laid out in its pages. It ended up changing my life and my relationship with God.

What I was most impressed with was its use of the Psalms, prescribing two per week at morning and evening prayer to be repeated throughout until the following Sunday when the Psalms would change. I discovered that this pattern of praying through the Psalms went back as far as St. Benedict of Nursia (480-547) and his famous Rule intended to order the life of monastics in the early centuries of the Christian era. But it can be traced even earlier than this, as God’s people of the Old Covenant prayed at specific times of the day, as recorded in key places in Scripture, such as Psalm 119:147-148, 164; Daniel 6:10; and Acts 10:3, 9, 30. These texts are easy to miss on a superficial reading, but they testify to a time when entire communities paused for corporate prayer several times a day, a practice that appears to have fallen out of use after the collapse of Rome in the west but continued in the monasteries.

Jesus Prayed the Psalms

Over the past four decades my prayer life has developed further, and I have acquired a small collection of prayer books and psalters, reflecting the patterns of daily prayer as practised in several traditions. Some of these, especially those with Lutheran origins, prescribe praying through the Psalms on a weekly basis. Others, following the Book of Common Prayer, organize the Psalms to be read every 30 days. In recent years I have followed the latter plan, taking me through the biblical Psalter 12 times a year, giving me a thorough acquaintance with the principal liturgical collection in the Bible.

The introduction to the Psalms in the New Jerusalem Bible tells the reader: “The spiritual riches of the Psalter need no commendation. ... They were recited by Jesus himself, by the Virgin Mary, the apostles and the early martyrs.” We sometimes forget that Jesus was an observant Jew, immersed in the liturgical patterns of his faith, including daily prayer. Some Christians prefer to see Jesus as a radical departure from the ethos of the Old Testament, preaching love and compassion instead of judgement and condemnation. Yet the fact that Jesus prayed through the Psalms, including those calling down God’s judgement on his enemies, is further indication that Jesus came, not to abrogate the Old Covenant, but to fulfil it in himself (Matt. 5:17-20).

Personally, I have come to love the biblical Psalter. As a child I learned some of the Psalms by heart, including numbers 23 and 100. Our congregation sang from a hymnal based on the 1912 Psalter. And more than 30 years ago, I fell in love with the Genevan Psalter, which has formed the basis for Reformed liturgies in several countries over the past four and a half centuries. So much have the Psalms become the centre of my prayer life that I have taken up their study and liturgical use as an avocation, to which I will return in a future column.

COMPUTERS & CROWS

Rudy Eikelboom | reikelboom@wlu.ca

What makes humans unique, and is this uniqueness a matter of degree or a qualitative difference? Is it our intelligence, language ability and consciousness? As Christians, we argue that we hold a special place in creation because we are made in the image of God. Two areas of research approach this question from very different directions.

Computer science is making great strides in developing artificial systems that mimic many of humans’ more unique abilities and put them into general use. Alexa, Siri and Google Assistant are all devices that respond to voice commands and provide verbal information. In the lab, programs can successfully compete in formal debates with humans or even write like humans. Artificial intelligence programs now teach themselves to play complex games like Go and chess better than our best human players. In my February column, I talked about a program that can determine how proteins fold with remarkable accuracy much more quickly than humans can. And, in many places, companies are working on making self-driving cars with considerable success. Will computers become conscious in the future? Advances in computer science are decreasing the divide between humans and machines.

In another research area, scientists find animals with abilities that mimic skills that were once thought to be solely human. While these abilities’ scale may be more limited, it is starting to appear as if we differ only in degree, not in kind. Researchers have focused on birds’ ability as they seem to be like those of higher primates despite being biologically far removed from mammals. Alex, a gray parrot trained by Irene Pepperberg, was argued to have the mental capabilities of a four-year-old child. Crows can do tasks that suggest aspects of consciousness. Frans de Waal has long argued that primates experience many of the same emotions as humans and engage in social behaviour that mimic human interactions.

Within Reach

What are we to make of these advances in comparative cognition and computer science about our place in God’s creation plan? Do they undercut the theology of being made in the image of God? Some may want to defend humans’ separation from the rest of creation and doubt that computers will acquire, or that animals have, true human abilities. However, an argument can be made that both these areas support a richer understanding of how God has structured his creation and the abilities he has given us.

God says in Genesis 1:26b “Let them have dominion over...” which suggests a difference in responsibility, not a difference in kind, just as a king was not different from a farmer but rather had differing obligations. Note also that humans did not get a unique day of creation but were created the same day as animals. The famous passage in John (3:16) does not refer to God’s love of humans but rather his love for the whole world. If we follow and expand this line of reasoning, then the richness of God’s creation makes it possible to think of animals as having many of the same abilities and capabilities as humans, perhaps in some domains exceeding what humans can do.

If we are created in some limited manner in God’s image, we should have many of his abilities. In that case, it is also possible we may have some of God’s creativity as the creator of the universe in all its diversity. Thus, our success in building computer programs that mimic and sometimes come to surpass human abilities may be an aspect of our image-bearing. However, there is a dark side to our ability that requires our prayers and concern. In Genesis 11:6, in the tower of Babel’s story, God says, “nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” As our technology and abilities progress, the darker aspects of our brokenness also become more evident. Each technological advance can be helpful and simultaneously harmful, and we need the redemption offered in Jesus to see the difference and avoid the evil.
THE PRICE OF DOING NOTHING

Emergency relief desperately needed in countries facing famine & COVID-19.

Maaike VanderMeer

AREAS IN FOUR COUNTRIES – Yemen, South Sudan, Burkina Faso and Nigeria – are considered to be in the grip of famine by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) right now. WFP is concerned for an additional 34 million people who are fast approaching famine, precipitated in part by COVID-19.

WFP has responded to the threat and reality of famine for the past 60 years. Julie Marshall, Canadian Communications Officer, told Christian Courier that WFP is predicting an 80 percent increase in famine this year, from 149 million people pre-COVID-19 to 270 million people in 2021 in the 80 countries where WFP works. The greatest impact is expected to fall in Latin America as well as West, Central, and Southern Africa.

“Famine is driven by conflict and fuelled by climate shocks and the COVID-19,” said Marshall. “In the simplest terms, famine means that every day in an area suffering from long-term hunger and malnutrition, at least two out of every 10,000 people will die of starvation or disease – often mothers, the elderly and young children.”

On January 28 Pope Francis received David Beasely, the head of WFP, for a private audience to address world famine.

WFP emphasizes the importance of emergency food assistance, focusing on small farmers, school feeding and direct food or cash during crises. “WFP needs US$5 billion in 2021 to avert famine and meet the urgent food and nutrition needs of at least 30 million people who are currently most at risk, but the price of doing nothing is exponentially higher,” said Marshall.

WFP is principally funded by over 60 governments. Beasley asked Pope Francis to join his appeal to billionaires who have grown wealthier through the COVID-19 pandemic to contribute to WFP.

Last March WFP opened an office in Ottawa. “Canada has been a vital partner for WFP working together to fight hunger around the world, in 2020 Canada was our 5th largest donor, contributing over US$244 million to our global programmes,” said Marshall. These funds have given WFP the flexibility to promote long-term solutions, making Canada “one of WFP’s most innovative partners.”

Maaike VanderMeer

Maaike is Assistant Editor with Christian Courier, currently living in B.C.

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OBITUARIES

BREEDVELD, Janna

It is with immense sadness that we announce the passing of our beloved Janna (Janny) Breedveld on Thursday March 18, 2021 in her 86th year.

Janny is survived by her loving husband of 57 years, Peter Breedveld, her children John (Nanda) Zwart, Margaret (Irving) Bos, Arnold (Sharon) Zwart, and Peter (Cordelia Nguyen) Breedveld. Janny is also survived by twelve grandchildren and eleven great grandchildren.

Born Janna Hendrika Slopsema in the village of Adorp the Netherlands, she immigrated to Canada in 1957 and was married the same year to Albert Zwart. Less than six years later she became a widow with three young children. Her second husband, Peter, came into her life like a knight in shining armour, embracing her with tender compatibility and affection, and loving her children as his own. Their marriage was truly a match made in heaven.

Janny is predeceased by her first husband Albert Zwart, son Edward Breedveld, sister Hariena Groen, and sister Hennie Top.

Janny’s personality was one of relational warmth, positivity, intelligence, fierce determination, and an ability to speak into situations wisely, often offering advice to friends and relatives that was truly insightful and helpful. She will be sorely missed by all who knew and loved her.

As per Janny’s wishes, cremation has taken place. Due to COVID 19 there will be no visitation.

In lieu of flowers donations in memory of Janny to L’Arche Canada would be appreciated. Janny loved working with special needs people, and after Edward passed away L’Arche provided a wonderfully positive outlet for her to work through her grief while contributing to the well-being of other individuals and families with similar challenges.

More information can be found at www.dbburlington.ca

EYGENRAAM, Jantje “Janny” (nee Winters)

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth. 
The Lord shall preserve your
going out and your coming in
From this time forth and
forevermore.
Ps. 121:1,8

Given life by our Lord on November 9, 1929
Taken to Himself February 21, 2021
Beloved wife of Frank Eygenraam
Dear mother and grandmother of
Norman and Heather Eygenraam, Palmerston, ON
Andrea, 
Wallace and Janet Eygenraam, Huntsville, ON
Cheryl and Lee Eccleston, Kim, Kevin and Stefany, David
John and Annamaria, Dundas, ON
Tamara and Scott Alexander, Angela and Chris Owen, Barry and Tiffany
Pete and Lynda Eygenraam, Fordwich, ON
Janine, Dianne, Rachel and AJ Wanders, Gregory and Tonilyn
Joyce and John Buis, Aylmer, ON
Crystal and Jeremy Colvin, Michael and Amber, Richard and Amanda
Paul Eygenraam, Hamilton, ON
and many great grandchildren.
Correspondence: Frank Eygenraam
1-150 First Ave
St. Thomas, ON
NSR 4P3

HEERINGA, Alma (nee Feddema)

Peacefully on February 17th, in her 94th year, Alma went to be with her Lord and Saviour. Beloved wife of 74 years to Ray. Dear mother of John (Carol) Heeringa, Dorothy (the late Sid) Wyenga, Renee Heeringa (Brian Gamble) and Maer (Honas) Brinkman. Lovingly remembered by her grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great grandchildren.

Loving sister of Pieter†, Anna Rintjema†, Ernie†, Bob†, Louise Boersma, Edna Noordeman†, Margaret Vander Eyk, Tina Schalk, Tom†, Jean Roszell, Charlie, Lukie De Waard, Pier† and John.

A visitation and funeral were held on February 20th at Rehoboth Christian Reformed Church. Memorial donations may be made to Knox or Durham Christian Schools. Online condolences may be left at www.northcuttelliott.com.

LANGENDYK, Heintje “Henny”

July 22, 1921 - March 5, 2021

Our beloved mother, Oma and Great-Oma passed away peacefully into the arms of her Lord and Saviour on March 5, 2021 in her hundredth year.

Predeceased by her beloved husband, Willem (Wim) in 2012 after 65 years of marriage. She will be dearly missed by Janny (Rudy) Eikelboom, Mary, Bert (Anne), Betsy (Bill) Kennedy, Helen (Hans) Zwaan, Dick (Kathy), 15 grandchildren and 17 great grandchildren. Also survived by sister Willy Nab of the Netherlands.

A private family funeral service was held on March 12, 2021.

Condolences for the family and donations to Ray of Hope or a charity of choice may be arranged through the funeral home at www.erbgood.com or 519-745-8445.

BEIMERS, Bertus

Dec. 19, 1926 - Feb. 26, 2021

Bert was born in Saint Anna Parochie, Friesland, and emigrated to Canada in 1948. He had a successful strawberry farm in Pembrooke, Ontario. He and his wife Doreen retired to B.C.

For the last 10 years Bert was in a total care facility at Elim.

Bert was always a very optimistic and positive person. Bert died knowing Jesus as his Lord and Saviour and passed into glory with a smile on his face.

He was predeceased by his first wife Harmine, his second wifc Doreen, and 7 of his brothers. He is survived by his youngest brother Andy, and three sisters-in-law Tine, Ida, Johanna, and many nieces and nephews.

HOOGENDAM, Johanna Frederika (nee Verschoor)

February 12, 1928 - January 29, 2021

It is with sadness that we announce the peaceful passing of Johanna, age 92, beloved wife of Peter Hoogendam, who went to be with her Lord.

Cathy (Tony) Vyn of West Lafayette, IN
Jasper (Jane) Hoogendam of Cold Springs, ON
George (Yolanda) Hoogendam of Vineland, ON
Rick (Ineke) Hoogendam of St. Catharines, ON
Alyda (Randy) Vroon of Newmarket, ON
18 grandchildren and 38 great grandchildren

Correspondence: Peter Hoogendam
Apt 101
4320 Lincoln Ave
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
90TH BIRTHDAY

BOSVELD, Martin P.J.

We give thanks to God for His faithfulness as we celebrate the 90th birthday of our husband, father, and Opa, Martin P.J. Bosveld, on April 5, 2021.

Husband of Lynn for over 54 years, Dad to Pauline, Ed (Joanne), Ray (Lisa), and Sandra, and Opa to 11 grandchildren.

Correspondence:
119 Balmoral Ave, Chatham, ON, N7L 4N4
martin.bosveld@outlook.com

EBOOK

Abraham Kuyper: Ascent of the Son—Descent of the Spirit
26 Meditations on Ascension & Pentecost (ebook)
Translator: Dr. John H. Boer, incl. Introduction
Free, but donation appreciated
www.SocialTheology.com/Kuyperiana
boerji@hotmail.com

JOBS

DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Shalom Manor and Gardens is a unique community of dedicated Christian Seniors of Dutch background expanding into Hamilton. In association with the expansion, applications are being accepted for a new position: Development Director. Please see our website for details: https://shalommanor.ca/get-involved/careers/

This posting closes April 30, 2021.

VANDER MEULEN, Jacob and Annie

May 4, 1956 – May 4, 2021

“The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forever more.” - Psalm 121:8.

Celebrating the 65th Wedding Anniversary of our parents JACOB and ANNIE VANDER MEULEN (nee Colyin).

We invite you to share in this special occasion with a “drive by” on Tuesday May 4, 2021 from 10-12 pm and 2-5 pm at their home.

Congratulations Dad and Mom for the many years that the Lord has blessed you together.

With love from your children: Earl (deceased), Christine and Luke, Evelyn and Sid, Marlene and Jerry, Liz and Don, Jackie and Michael, Andrew and Jennifer, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Home address: 193 Jarvis Road, Wooler, Ontario K0K 3M0
Best wishes only.

VACATION

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OBITUARIES

Hendrik Hart (1935-2021)

Henk died at 9:30 am on March 15, 2021 after a valiant 24-year battle with prostate cancer. He is survived by his son, Klaas (Anita), grand-daughters Sophie Marieke, Maurya and Anika, his brothers Willem (Carroll), Dirk, Peter (Helen), Michael (Mary-Virginia), Anton (Linell) and his sister Willa as well as many cousins, nephews and nieces. He was pre-deceased by his first daughter Esther at her birth, his second daughter Esther (2007) and his wife Anita (2009).

Henk was born in The Netherlands and emigrated to Canada in 1953. He completed his undergraduate education at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan and obtained his PhD from the Free University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. After graduation he served briefly as Director of the Free University’s Philosophical Institute, before moving back to Canada in 1966 to become the Executive Director and first ‘Senior Member’ (professor) at the newly founded Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto. Henk served ICS as Senior Member in Systematic Philosophy for 35 years, retiring in 2001.

He was the author of many academic books and is perhaps best known for his 1989 book, Setting our sights by the Morning Star, Reflections on the role of the Bible in post-modern times. He also traveled and lectured widely across Canada and the USA in the ICS Discovery series. For a period of twelve years he was granted a preaching license in the CRC and proved to be a popular preacher to many. He was a deeply spiritual philosopher and theologian.

Henk also took an initiative to start As We Are (AWARE) to promote acceptance for gays and lesbians in the church. While many in the church saw this as a destructive deviation from the true path, he saw these concerns as part and parcel of his calling.

He was an inveterate bird–watcher and would go anywhere, anytime to get the right shot. While living with cancer, Henk discovered that love makes all things new and that living in love is living in God. We are grateful to have shared that love with him. (patmos@interlog.com)

ANNIVERSARIES

VISser, Leo and Alice

“A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:12

On May 7th, 2021, with praise and thanksgiving, we celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of our beloved parents, Leo and Alice Visser.

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for showing us what love and commitment looks like in everyday life. Thank you for wholeheartedly serving the Lord all the days of your lives and for providing a godly heritage for us all. Our prayer for you is that our Lord will continue to uphold you, bless you and keep you in His gracious care.

With love from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren,
Ray and Arlene Borg
Joyana & Reuben Noel (Theo and Everly)
Jonathon
Wes and Tracey Visser
Tyler and Maria Visser (Alayah, William and Baby)
Jillayna and Peter Koooy (Charlie and Daphne)
Brianna and David DeRooy (Ellie)
Dolina and Harold Bentum
Josiah
Rachel and Sandy Kielstra (Baby)
Justin
James and Shereen Visser
Julia
David
Address: Leo and Alice Visser, Apartment 305, 278 Hurst Dr. Barrie, ON L4N 0Z3

VANDER MEULEN, Jacob and Annie

May 4, 1956 – May 4, 2021

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Best wishes only.

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Classifieds
FOR THE LOVE OF CREATION

Why the path to climate justice includes both personal and political action.

Karri Munn-Venn

THE BUDDING LILACS outside my window are framed by a vibrant blue sky. The sunshine is welcome after days of rain and wind. I can see the Gatineau Hills across the way, and I am grateful. In the “before times,” after getting the kids out the door for school, I would have made my way to the bus stop, to the train and to my downtown office. Today, I load up the water totes, put on my dusty barn coat, and head out the back door to feed and water our five miniature sheep and 83 assorted chickens; to muck out the barn and collect a stunning rainbow of eggs. It all takes no more than 30 minutes, and I’m back inside, cleaned up and at my computer in my living room workspace.

The world looks very different than it did a year ago. For some people, the commute has become an anxious trip across town to spend an uncertain day dealing with the public. For others, like me, the commute has vanished. My new farm life is a big step along a path my family and I have been navigating for some time. A path to town, where we get our food, and how we care for this land and the animals. Because living a rural life has allowed us to deepen our connection with the created world. And we all know that we protect the things that we love.

UNITING OUR VOICES

Alongside my personal journey, I have also joined my voice with thousands of people in Canada calling on the federal government to make policy changes that will move us further and faster towards the Paris temperature goals. Over the past four years, we’ve asked them to put a price on carbon (and they did!), to end subsidies to the fossil fuel sector, and to invest in a just, inclusive transition to a green economy, to name a few.

When the global scientific community said that the world had a mere decade to drastically reduce emissions, several churches and faith-based organizations in Canada – including the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue (CPD) and the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) – came together to discuss ways that we might deepen our collective action and engage our communities on climate change in this critical decade.

These discussions led to the development of For the Love of Creation, which was launched on Earth Day 2020. So far over 35 faith bodies and faith-based organizations have endorsed the initiative, including the PCC and World Renew, and agreed to work together in the areas of theological reflection, local and congregational engagement, and political advocacy.

We have pledged to collaborate more deeply, more intensely and engage more broadly than we ever have before. This pledge is a gesture of honour to Indigenous peoples’ resilience, their wisdom, and their place at the front of any struggle; of global partners who show a sustainable way forward even in imminent crisis; of social movements, here in Canada which have worked so diligently for accountability and change; and to honour young people, whose transformative work is changing everything. We welcome any community of faith in Canada to join us in this movement.

FAITH IN ACTION

On February 17 we launched our joint faith-in-action campaign. Through this campaign, we are mobilizing people across Canada to reduce emissions and demonstrate support for increased federal climate action by writing letters to federal Cabinet Ministers on a range of climate justice issues. This campaign speaks to the desire of concerned individuals and communities to “do something” while at the same time acknowledging that the scale of the problem requires government action towards systems-change.

The combination of personal and political action is important for a couple of reasons: One, uncertainty about what to do can lead to despair, isolation, silence and inaction – and this inaction can be understood by politicians as approval of the status quo. And two, signaling that we are working to reduce our own emissions allows us to press government with greater integrity.

This year’s pledge also includes a commitment to engage in acts of solidarity with justice-seeking communities, which reinforces our commitment not only to climate action, but to climate justice.

We know that we need to take swift and bold actions now to maintain global temperature rise to 1.5°C (over pre-Industrial levels), and we must do so in a way that addresses inequalities, reinforces human rights and builds resilience in communities.

That is why we are calling on the Government of Canada to:

Increase our national GHG emissions reduction target and invest in a just transition to a fair, inclusive, green economy;

Implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including, but not limited to, the right of free, prior and informed consent;

Commit equal support for climate change adaptation and mitigation measures in the Global South.

I am honoured to have connected with hundreds of climate justice advocates over the last number of years. I am grateful for their inspiration, the ways that they have challenged me, and ultimately for the ways in which they’ve made this beautiful and urgent movement better.

I hope that more of these passionate individuals, folks who are on their own journey to climate justice, will register as organizers for the For the Love of Creation faith-in-action campaign. Local organizers will bring the national campaign to their communities encouraging individuals to take action.

For the Love of Creation will provide electronic materials on climate change and the policy asks of the campaign, personal action ideas and downloadable pledge cards, customizable online letters to Cabinet ministers, and resources to support Earth Day public witness events.

I hope you’ll join us, for the love of creation.

FIND OUT MORE Register, make a pledge or send letters at fortheloveofcreation.ca. The campaign will take place mostly online and run right through until October 4, 2021, including a public witness event on April 22, Earth Day.

Karri Munn-Venn

Karri is the Senior Policy Analyst at Citizens for Public Justice, a national organization of members inspired by faith to act for justice in Canadian public policy. She is also an artist and farmer. She lives with her fabulous family at Fermes Leystone Farms in west Québec.