

CHRISTIANCOURIER

Theme: Hospitality

Christ-centred. Creative. Canadian.



"No Room" by Joy Banks (linocut print). Used with permission.

MATTHEW HOUSE MAKES ROOM

What Christians can do to make Canada a welcoming place for refugees. | [Alexis Jacklin](#)

"I DON'T REALLY LIKE POLITICS" is a sentiment I have heard countless times, even in Christian communities. But immigration, like many other things, is political. Canadians involved in welcoming refugees spoke to *Christian Courier* (CC) about how to get political by supporting refugee resettlement.

"Getting to Canada is only the beginning," says Kailee Brennan, Executive Director of Matthew House Ottawa. Her organization runs 26 reception and transition homes across Ottawa where refugee claimants can stay for three to six months after they first arrive. Every night more than 240 people enjoy a bed, food and family-style support thanks to Matthew House.

"Housing is very expensive," explained Brennan. "You can't afford market housing unless you're able to get a good job and you're not able to get a good job unless you have high levels of English, so there are a lot of barriers that people continue to face after they arrive."

The cost of basic living necessities such as groceries, gas, rent and housing has gone up by 18-20 percent since 2021. Canadians are feeling the repercussions of this, but so are newcomers and refugees. Matthew House, which opened in Ottawa in 2010, runs a furniture bank that has helped furnish the homes of over 10,000 newcomers and other marginalized people. But Matthew House

also goes beyond providing for physical needs.

MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

"I wish more Canadians understood that welcoming newcomers is about much more than providing a place to live or donating essential items," Mahnoor Chandio, the Director of Operations at Matthew House told CC. "Building meaningful relationships, helping people navigate unfamiliar systems, practicing patience and creating a sense of belonging are just as important." Refugees bring valuable skills, education and experiences, explained Chandio. "A supportive community can make an enormous difference in helping them regain confidence and establish a successful future in Canada."

Abdul Al-Kaf came to Canada as a refugee in 2019 and is now the senior manager of transition homes for Matthew House Ottawa: "I've seen so many doctors and engineers, and people who were this huge thing in their own country. But they had to leave everything behind." Only 44 percent of refugees who came to Canada in the past decade are working in jobs matching their education level. One of the many reasons for this mismatch is the obstacles refugees face when trying to relocate for work.

Big city hubs like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal are the

[Continued on page 2](#)

REFUGEES CONTINUED

most common places people land when they first arrive in Canada. According to Al-Kaf, it can be difficult for refugee claimants to move within Canada, even if a different community might fit their language or employment skills better. For example, he's met refugees who speak French well and would like to live in Quebec, but they can't move easily because their lawyer and paperwork are all in Ontario. Resettlement processes vary widely province to province.

Families that are separated face additional challenges. Al-Kaf has met refugees who, after reunification, were struggling to rebuild relationships with family members after years apart. "I've had some previous clients who finally were able to get their kids here," said Al-Kaf. "And most of them say their connection with their kids is not the same because they were away for almost half of their lives."

These families are living with high levels of anxiety. "There's a mental health toll on people when they're waiting, wondering: 'Can I stay in this place or not?' 'Can I make long-term friends or not?' 'Will I be kicked out of this country?'"

CONVERSATION IS KEY

Despite these challenges, there are organizations and individuals within Christian communities working hard to remove barriers.



Matthew House Ottawa volunteers and residents enjoy time together at a reception home on Wellington Ave. This location is operated in partnership with the Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall.

"Religious groups continue to be leading actors within Canada's resettlement programs and it's important that the government recognize their role," wrote Geoffrey Cameron in a *Policy Options* article. In 2021, 90 of Canada's 120 private sponsorship agreement holders had a religious affiliation. "Religious groups are effective at private sponsorship because they motivate their community members through appeals to shared spiritual principles and have the

structures and resources that can be mobilized into the field of social action," wrote Cameron.

Dena Nicolai is a program associate at World Renew, which has partnered with Canadian churches to settle over 11,000 refugees for almost 50 years. She has witnessed this work firsthand: "Christians and Christian communities, most commonly churches, are currently in unique positions to be the support systems and networks for refugees and newcomers to Canada," Nicolai told CC. One of the ways churches offer support is by providing community meals or conversation cafes that serve as safe, comfortable places for language learning.

"It can be really intimidating, especially as an adult, to be learning a new language," said Nicolai.

VOTE FOR WELCOME

Nicolai encouraged church communities to be creative and ask newcomers directly what would be beneficial to them, then get political: "We need to ask: how might this change how I vote? What opportunity might there be for me to speak with my elected representative about this?"

"We need better policy. We need different policy, but we also need to remember the human beings right in front of us," said

Nicolai. "We can't improve policy without understanding the real impacts on people's lives."

These days, being kind and compassionate to newcomers is political. A report published in April by the federal government states: "The proportion of Canadians who believe there are too many immigrants coming to Canada has risen substantially over the last two years. As of fall 2025, 56 percent of Canadians believe the country accepts too many immigrants."

In response, the federal government has reduced the number of privately sponsored refugees allowed into the country from 23,000 to 16,000 in just the past year. "Many sponsors, including church sponsors, are ready and waiting to welcome more ref-

ugees but are stuck waiting for spaces to open up amidst long wait times," said Rena Namago in an email to CC. Namago is the refugee and migrant rights policy officer with Citizens for Public Justice and a contributor to the 2026 book *A Renewed Canadian Welcome*. Yet she believes that churches should persist. "I think there's always an opportunity for more churches to be involved in supporting refugee sponsorship," said Namago. "The need is far greater than the capacity dedicated by the government for these cases."



Alexis Jacklin

Alexis is based in Ottawa, Ont. She has a B.A. in political science and is a graduate of Simon Fraser's Writer's Studio.

PLIGHT

Sorrow
is backed up at your border

It is another day in the life of the world
on its head

Sorrow and need
are lined up
and leaning against the line
you have drawn around yourself

Sorrow and need
fear and desperation
broken walls, broken water mains, broken arms

and people
far too many people
are massed at your gate

Let them in
Feel overwhelmed
but let them in

Feed them
clothe and house
care for and school their children
Find work for their hands

Sing them your songs

Learn theirs

Yes. Ask
to learn their lost songs of home



John Terpstra

John is a Hamilton, Ont., poet, writer and retired carpenter and furniture-maker. This poem is used with the permission of Gaspereau Press.

FRONT PAGE ART

Joy Banks is an artist in Vancouver, B.C., the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. "No Room" is a linocut print Banks created one Advent during the Syrian refugee crisis. At the time, Banks was working in a church community in Vancouver connected to Kinbrace Society, which welcomes and supports refugee claimants. She was wrestling with the question: "Who is welcomed readily into our country and who isn't?" She also wondered: "What gets in the way of our welcome?" "What distracts us from the awareness of the struggles of the displaced?"

"When you start thinking about hospitality in depth, I think it challenges all aspects of our lives from how we live on the land, who we welcome and how we embrace displaced parts of ourselves," Banks told CC.

The theme of hospitality and welcoming the stranger runs through many of Banks' pieces, often exploring the gifts of mutual transformation that come in unexpected places. "Hospitality for me is one of those things where the roles often get flip-flopped. You know, who's the host and who's the guest? In Scripture, we find that holy messengers often come first as strangers to be welcomed."

DISEMBARKING A DENOMINATION

In July, All Nations Church in Halifax officially disaffiliated from the CRC and joined the Presbyterian Church in Canada. | [Rachel Boehm](#)



All Nations Church members participated in The Coldest Night of the Year fundraiser walk in support of local charities on February 28.

YOU COULD SAY IT ALL STARTED HERE IN HALIFAX: the Canadian arm of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), that is. After World War II, most of the Dutch immigrants who founded the CRC in Canada arrived by boat at Pier 21. But if you visit Halifax this fall, you'll no longer find a CRC.

Today, a new sign stands outside All Nations Church with "The Presbyterian Church in Canada" (PCC) near the bottom. Other than the new sign, the church doesn't appear much different than it did a few years back, when it was a small but vibrant congregation that actively participated in CRC denominational governance and generously supported many CRC activities. Long-held commitments to faithful spiritual care of members haven't changed. Nor has the congregation's intention to be a force of love and care for our community. All Nations still looks after those who can't buy groceries or pay their bills in our increasingly expensive city. Long-held social traditions persist. There's still the summer picnic on the Northwest Arm, an Advent talent show and a raucous musical chairs competition held every January.

Other small changes are evident, though. Ecclesiastical relationships now focus on sister Presbyterian Church in Canada churches in the Halifax region. Sister CRCs in the Maritimes are no longer referenced in weekly prayers. Our offerings are for similar local causes as before the disaffiliation, but denominational ones are now PCC. Yet, you don't hear anyone saying "All Nations PCC." It's just All Nations now, maybe a subtle acknowledgement that denominational affiliations have shown themselves to be unreliable.

Nevertheless, this transition has been painful for me. My family on both sides has been CRC for generations and my dad served as a pastor in the denomination. I worked in communications for the CRC for many years, even handling media relations at several consecutive synods (denominational general assemblies) in the 90s. My volunteer roles throughout adulthood have mostly been with the CRC. I share these biases and note that my experience of the denomination – and my account of All Nations' departure from it – is deeply personal and shaped by my own perspectives. It does not reflect the totality of experiences of other members of my congregation. Being cast out from one's spiritual home is difficult and heartbreaking, and I tell this story still grieving that loss.

A DIVERSE CHURCH

The story I tell starts in Halifax. Most of the post-World War II Dutch immigrants who arrived in Halifax, including my dad (a teen at the

time) and his family, quickly boarded trains for work in Ontario and farther westward. Along with bulging suitcases and dreams of a better life, these displaced persons, battered by the ravages of war, carried with them deeply held traditions and their reformed faith.

A small number of immigrants stayed in Halifax, and as early as 1953, members of the Halifax CRC met regularly. The church community was formally organized in 1958. Halifax CRC shed its Dutch identity earlier than most CRCs, striving to reflect and embrace the population of its port city home. The name change to All Nations CRC in 1978 reflected this vision.

THE CULTURE WAR

Then came a global pandemic and, with it, sweeping societal changes. In the years following covid, the political environment south of the border became increasingly polarized around issues of race, sexuality and gender. The CRC, especially in the United States, also took a turn to more traditional, evangelical, conservative positions.

In 2022, the CRC's synod decided that the word "chastity" in the Heidelberg Catechism prohibits, among other things, homosexual sex. This decision aligned with the values of, and was applauded by, a growing number of Christian Reformed congregations. On the other end of the spectrum, the decision left a minority of well-established, liberal-leaning congregations reeling – on both sides of the border.

Eventually, as a result of subsequent synodical decisions, All Nations and other CRCs were given an ultimatum: repent and withdraw from their positions as affirming, inclusive congregations, or remain affirming and be disciplined. The discipline, synod decided, would involve being led by another church, one in compliance with recent



Rachel Boehm on a site visit in Ecuador while working for CRWRC (now World Renew).

decisions. Either way, All Nations would clearly no longer be the church it was, a welcoming home for people of diverse backgrounds, genders and sexual orientations.

NAVIGATING CHANGE

Drawing on members' expertise, All Nations designed a process that helped the congregation to understand the denominational issues and participate in decision-making. My church explored the pros and cons of a range of potential affiliation options through meetings, discussions, presentations and surveys. There were complex ecclesiastical and legal implications to consider.

By the time a vote was called to leave the CRC and join the PCC in early 2025, the decision to disaffiliate was unanimous. That being said, I think it would be unfair to say that everyone was of the same mindset in defying synod's direction on human sexuality. During the time after these decisions and prior to All Nations' disaffiliation, a number of families and members of All Nations left the congregation. Meanwhile, others – concerned about causing further harm to LGBTQ+ members and their families – urged church leadership to accelerate All Nations' departure from the CRC.

It's now autumn 2026. On any given Sunday, you'll enter the beautiful old brick building in the heart of Halifax to hear preaching from the Bible; prayers for the people, the city and the world; spirited music and active participation in worship by members, young and old.

While the congregation appears to have moved on, the im-

pact on individuals has been profound. In a service that allowed members to share thoughts and feelings about leaving the CRC, people expressed sadness, betrayal, grief and loss. Others shared gratitude and pride in how All Nations navigated the journey. For some, the perceived ruthlessness with which the CRC made decisions that drove out inclusive congregations has eroded their trust in institutions overall, especially the church. Despite these mixed emotions, most members feel proud that All Nations stayed true to its convictions to live out the love of Jesus Christ in an ever-changing world.

SETTING A NEW COURSE

From time to time at the Halifax pier, I see a Holland America Line cruise ship dock. It's called the Volendam, named for the ship that ferried my dad's family, and thousands of other Dutch immigrants, across the Atlantic to Halifax to begin a new life after the war. The immigrants seldom had time to look back and grieve their losses though they had reason to do so, having lived through the hunger winter, the bombings and Nazi occupation.

Now, on the other side of the culture war that engulfed our formerly beloved denomination, All Nations isn't looking back either. Cast off from the moorings of the CRC, All Nations has trimmed our sails and set a new course, eager to see where this journey of love for God and neighbours will take us. 🌊



Rachel Boehm

Rachel is an executive leader in the public sector and has been a member of All Nations since 2005.

CELEBRATING A WEDDING AS THE WORLD BURNS



Maaïke VanderMeer

Maaïke is co-editor of Christian Courier and lives with Derek in a tiny studio apartment at the University of B.C. in Vancouver. Their walls are already full of art.

WHEN I STARTED TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT MY ENGAGEMENT to Derek, all that joy felt out of place. The start of 2026 was a precarious time. It seemed as if every month, Meghan and I were editing a news story on a country Trump had threatened or invaded. Several international friends made plans to travel to our wedding from Europe and then cancelled them due to global uncertainty and rising fuel prices.

“It feels right and yet so strange to celebrate a wedding when the world is upside down,” I texted a friend. “It’s a strange dissonance, huh?” she replied. “Personal joy while the world burns.”

How could we celebrate something so joyful when so many people were living in apprehension? How could we dare to declare something new – to put our time and money there and ask our loved ones to do the same – when it seemed wiser to buckle down before a storm?

SUFFERING WITH CHRIST

I grew up believing that God’s will would be accomplished in my life, irrespective of my wishes or feelings. Maybe *CC* readers can tell me if I’m right in guessing that this is part of my generation’s inheritance from our immigrant families. “God’s will” makes sense of unthinkable losses: famine, war, betrayal in communities, the rupture of emigration and challenges in a new country – the isolating grief of death, miscarriage, illness and financial struggles.

I had the added examples, as a missionary kid, of modern martyr stories. Suffering, I believed, was a pathway to being a fully realized human – God eclipses you in his story.

But while suffering forms us, joy does as well. And being fully formed in God isn’t just about his distant glory, but about becoming our real and beloved selves. One of my teachers in Uganda, “Uncle Jonnes,” read Psalm 23 and boomed: “Imagine your enemies! Imagine them around you, and you are sitting down to eat.” And then he pantomimed pushing up his sleeves and tucking into a good piece of chicken. That was 2015, and I couldn’t imagine it yet. But the image stuck.

I could see that my belief that God was waiting to harm me or those I loved – and that other people would eventually disappoint me – was a flawed system. If in Christ all things are created and all things hold together, then the blueprint for our world is generosity. It is more-than-enough. Everything that falls short of that is an aberration, not the norm.

I wasn’t sure then how to live with generosity as my default assumption of God and others, but I have spent the last decade trying.

‘DON’T BE AFRAID OF ITS PLENTY’

Derek’s and my first date was in the Pacific Spirit forest along Vancouver’s shoreline – we squinted into an August setting sun and decided that we wanted to be in a relationship. Later, holding hands and walking back to the car, I quoted (badly) Mary Oliver’s poem that begins with rumours of war and ends – “don’t be afraid / of its plenty. Joy is not meant to be a crumb.”

Over the next two years that sense of more-than-we-ever-expected joy kept expanding: in the bright green moss of Pacific forests during dark months; in our spontaneous sightings of orcas and encounters with grouse and black bears; in the long conversations we had each evening over the phone; in sharing communion and evening complines; in the welcome our respective families showed. “Everyone



Maaïke and Derek got married at Swallowfield Farm on August 15.

should be this lucky!” we kept saying. After years of believing that God desired my joy I was experiencing it in a new way.

And, despite my caution in sharing it with friends, they responded with an answering joy. One writer friend in the States, a gentle soul who told me her writing had become mostly political “rant,” wrote: “ENJOY every moment, every eruption of laughter, every pinprick of light. I am drinking in your joy!!!!”

When I wrote news stories on the Ebola epidemic in Congo for *CC* in June, I interviewed people who belonged to my family’s wider network – which meant that, as we talked about deaths of their friends and colleagues, they were also cheering for my wedding and teasing me about how many goats Derek would give my father. They gave me messages to pass along to Derek, welcoming him as an in-law. It is always a good time to grow your family.

ABUNDANCE

In the end, every part of our wedding day rang with generosity and joy. I’m not sure Derek or I have found the words for it yet.

All of the flowers for our wedding were grown by a church friend of my sister-in-law. We found 15 pre-picked buckets of zinnias cooling in her home – she had traded with her gardening friends, she told me, to get every colour, and then welcomed us to bend over her dahlias and baby’s breath and calendula and eucalyptus and asparagus (yes, really!). We took away two carloads of flowers, and her prayer of thanks for God’s “bounty,” in flowers and love.

CC was mentioned in many speeches: Derek and I met because of the community in these pages, and were married at Swallowfield Farm four years after I met Jenny and Dennis deGroot at Swallowfield to interview them for *CC*.

A thing leads to a thing, leads to a friendship, leads to the family expanding. A single conversation, a single article, leads to a new introduction, a widening circle. We live in a time of strange dissonance, but joy is not meant to be a crumb. Joy is a feast and the table is set under the well-laden pear trees.

A friend of mine from university led a blessing ceremony before the wedding. I was surrounded by women from different parts of my life; each read a blessing over the life I was beginning with Derek. Minutes before I walked down the grassy aisle between Jenny’s teenager-tall sunflowers, the group shouted in unison: “Be this day one of joy, and the life that follows it even more joyful!”

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

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WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT CC?

Our reader survey takes less than 10 minutes. Please take the time to let us know what you like about CC and what you wish we could change. Your feedback impacts our strategic planning and encourages us in our work.

Go to: christiancourier.ca/2026-reader-survey/ or scan the QR code.

The survey closes on October 20.

VOTING 'NO' IN ALBERTA

Meghan Kort



AT THE END OF AUGUST, *CC* invited Alberta readers to tell us how they plan to vote in the October 19 referendum. We received 20 responses by email and one handwritten letter. All 21 respondents said they are not in favour of Alberta separating from Canada. Most used all caps and exclamation points to underscore their pro-Canada position, and two said they would leave Alberta and move back to Canada if they had to. Only one reader expressed indifference about participating in the referendum vote on October 19, but the rest said they will be at the polls or have ordered a mail-in ballot.

Several readers described this referendum as a misdirected waste of taxpayer money. *CC* columnist Bob Bruinsma said he will vote reluctantly: “I say ‘reluctantly’ because I’m generally not a fan of referenda. Governments have four years between elections to do their work and then the next election should be the real referendum of how the electorate feels about the job they’ve done.”

Question 10 in this referendum asks Albertans if they would like their province to hold “a binding provincial referendum on whether or not Alberta should separate from Canada.” Voters will choose between option one: “Alberta should remain a province of Canada” and option two, which invites the government of Alberta to hold another referendum specifically on separation. “Yes, we are having a referendum on holding a referendum!” quipped one respondent.

Maki VanDyke, who lives in Rosebud, Alta., a hamlet of about

100 people between Calgary and Drumheller, says she is confident that about eight people in her community will choose option two and expects a similar ratio to play out across the province. But she worries some Albertans will vote strategically. “I can see many Canadian-minded Albertans choosing option two on question 10 to strengthen Alberta’s negotiating position for greater provincial powers.”

Since about half of the referendum questions deal with immigration, *CC* asked Albertan readers to tell us about their experiences welcoming newcomers. Several readers shared specific stories about how they have supported refugees and how immigrants have blessed their communities.

“It has been an overwhelmingly enriching experience,” wrote Cecil Van Niejenhuis. He and his

wife Karen have been involved with welcoming refugees in their church and community for many years. “It humbles, it stretches, it engages, it keeps us from being locked into our own selves and our own subconscious entitlements and perspectives.”

Every reader indicated that they would be voting “no” to questions intended to limit newcomers’ access to services.

“Alberta’s neighbourly spirit is overwhelmingly generous, gracious, non-intrusive and practical,” wrote Van Dyke, referencing the hospitality Calgary and Edmonton residents showed evacuees from the Fort McMurray fires in 2016 and during 2013 flooding. “I would say that at heart, prairie people don’t like being told what to do or what to think, yet they have a strong ethic of support and cooperation.” She says a few bad actors have the media’s ear, but the majority of Albertans want a welcoming province.

One reader took the time to mail *CC* a clipping from the *Lethbridge Herald*. In a column, Ken Moore wrote: “The primary victim is not Ottawa or the federal system. It is Alberta’s social fabric, where neighbours, families and communities are increasingly being pushed to take opposing sides in a manufactured crisis of belonging.”



ARE YOU A BUILDER?

Christian Courier is looking for photos and stories about things you’ve built. Think garden boxes, LEGO creations, birdhouses, machines, apps, furniture, quilts and puzzles. Have you built a community event or program or an efficient system at work or church? A couple of generations ago, the readers of this paper were building schools and churches. Are we still builders at heart? **Send your pictures and stories to editor@christiancourier.ca before October 30.** All submissions will have a chance to win one of three \$100 gift certificates to your favourite local supply store. Let’s keep building!

THANKS FOR REMEMBERING

Thanks, Jaime! A beautiful account of Brian Doerksen’s impact on several generations (“Brian Doerksen’s hallelujah still resounds in my home,” Sept. 2026). Many of his songs take me back to particular times and places, even within the first few bars. Appreciate you sharing your memories.

Kristie Spyksma

ON CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

In his August submission to *CC*, John Valk (“Christian Nationalism and Synod”) attempts to tie Synod (and by extension those who agree with the heart of its decisions) to Christian nationalism. I trust I speak for many in saying I hold to a traditional Christian sexual ethic not because of political persuasion but because of conviction from the word of God. I am in fact appalled by American Christian nationalism, and I hope Valk and others stop trying to discredit my convictions by suggesting they are influenced by this movement.

Paul Zomer
Erin, Ont.

OPEN DOORS

A lovely article (“God doesn’t shout his grace across a distance” by Mike Koot, Sept. 2026). Not just about the CRC’s relationship to other reformed churches but also about relationships in general. Keeping the door open, always!

Christina Wubs
Surrey, B.C.

RELATABLE EDITORIAL

I also feel guilt (“OCD and Me” by Jennifer Boone, September 2026) if I don’t pray for everyone and against every possible bad scenario that could happen. God told me this week that I’m not responsible for everyone and everything – only to be faithful in my little corner. It gave me great relief.

Marianne Jones
Thunder Bay, Ont.

WELCOME, JOHN BAKKER!



The Reformed Faith Witness, the board that publishes *Christian Courier*, warmly welcomes a new treasurer this fall. John Bakker is a retired accountant and former partner in a CPA accounting firm in Smithers, B.C. Other than playing with numbers, he enjoys golf, pickleball, squash and various outdoor activities in the winter. He and his wife Irene have three adult children and five grandchildren who live nearby.

PRAYING FOR SALMON TO RETURN

From the Buck Creek in Houston, B.C., to the Yukon River, low salmon numbers are a cause for concern.

Maaike VanderMeer



Spawning salmon in Sockeye Creek, a tributary of the Skeena River.

JEFFREY MACKIE-DEERNSTED, ARCHDEACON OF THE KLONDIKE, in the Yukon, says he hears the same song at almost every event he attends. Sung by the Hän singers, an intergenerational group from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, it is "a prayer song, hoping that the salmon will come back."

"In the six years that I've been here, the salmon haven't come back," said Mackie-Deernsted. "The numbers are so amazingly low compared to what they were historically. There's a definite, I would say, sadness with it."

Chinook salmon travel one of the world's longest freshwater migration routes of over 3,000 kilometres. 1,867 Chinook salmon were counted in the Stewart River, a tributary of the Yukon River, this summer, far below the threshold necessary for fishing. Thirty years ago, over 180,000 Chinook returned and First Nations elders talk about a time they could walk across the river on the backs of migrating salmon. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) said last year that up to half of Chinook salmon are disappearing en route to their spawning grounds, but "the reasons remain unclear, with suspected causes ranging from disease to rising water temperatures due to climate change."

In 2024, the Yukon and Alaska agreed to a 6-year moratorium on fishing the Yukon River. But for years before that, many First Nations people in the Yukon, including the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, took a voluntary moratorium, sacrificing a stable food source – and much more.

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in youth still attend fish camp, where they learn harvest traditions, but with salmon shipped in from the Taku River – a watershed that still supports a healthy population. In a 2024 video, Erika Sheffen, a Hän Language Teacher, said: "Even though we can't have [salmon] anymore those traditions still need to be taught because what if they do come back one day, right? If that miracle ever happens."

In every ceremony, Mackie-Deernsted said, the absence of salmon is keenly felt. "The caribou, fishing for salmon – it's part of traditions, part of the culture. And so when these things are changed – when they're not allowed because there's not enough to fish – these losses touch you spiritually and psychologically."

COMMON LANGUAGE

"I don't think people who don't live in B.C. quite understand how integral salmon are in this ecosystem," said Cindy Verbeek, who grew up in Calgary and studied in Edmonton before moving to Houston, B.C. over 30 years ago. "Salmon are so important because they take nutrients from the ocean and bring them far inland. They lay their eggs way up here in central B.C. Those eggs and fry are food for the creatures in our river. As they go to the ocean they are food in



Mural featuring spawning salmon on a wastewater facility in Chilliwack, B.C.

the river and estuary. They then turn around and come back, and are food for all of the creatures that live on that river. And even when they die, they become food for the plants and the ecosystem. It's God's way of providing for literally most of B.C."

Verbeek is the founder of Buck Creek Hatchery and Nature Centre, which operates on the Upper Bulkley River, an inland tributary of the 580-kilometre-long Skeena River which salmon take to the ocean. "When I go to Terrace (300 kilometres away) and speak in churches there," Verbeek says, "I remind them that whatever goes past them is coming to us. We are connected through these riverways and through the nutrients that are brought back and forth by the salmon."

In August, the federal government announced a 7.5 million dollar grant to help the Wilp'Ho Dix Hatchery in the Skeena River system in northwestern B.C. "It's fantastic news as far as I'm concerned," Verbeek told CC. "They're going to be a much bigger operation than we are, which is great because they're going to

be adding more fish into the system."

Buck Creek Hatchery, run by A Rocha Canada on behalf of the DFO, is a stewardship hatchery that emphasizes community involvement and education. It opened in 2017. Salmon are the "common language" for Houston's 2,500 residents, Verbeek said. "Everyone I talked to, no matter who they were, just started saying, 'You start a hatchery, I'm on board. This is really important.'"

Every year, staff and volunteers walk the river and catch coho salmon ready to spawn. They harvest their eggs and milt and raise the fertilized eggs to fry. "People care about what they can be part of," Verbeek said.

There's debate over whether hatcheries are helpful to wild fish, Verbeek notes. "I think we've gotten to a point where we have manipulated the ecosystem so badly that we can't do hands-off conservation anymore." A hatchery should "re-boost the stocks. And once that happens hatcheries should, in my mind, quit."

A hatchery only works in the



Cindy Verbeek, Northern B.C. Coordinator with A Rocha Canada.

context of restoring the habitat the fish live in. A Rocha organizes the Upper Bulkley River Roundtable, where federal, provincial and Wet'suwet'en governments, as well as local nonprofits and contractors, get together a few times a year and share their plans. Collaboration involves landowners, too, as most of the river runs through private land.

But even with these positive moves, Verbeek says increasing water temperatures make watershed restoration "not enough. We need to restore healthy habitat and pray that what we can't restore, the salmon can adapt to . . . and that they adapt quickly."

PRAY FOR THE SALMON

Mackie-Deernsted serves three First Nations, all of which are connected to a river, and each community prays for the salmon to return. Referring to himself as "a Canadian southerner" from Ottawa, Mackie-Deernsted said he didn't grow up thinking about what a changing climate meant. That changed when he moved to the Yukon: "being an Anglican priest up here, and being in solidarity with my communities, I learned that the environmental issues are right in your backyard, right in your face."

Mackie-Deernsted urges the church to show solidarity: "I think it's imperative that Christians, whether they're Anglicans or not, be very conscious that this is going on in Canada – communities that we are worshipping with, that we're connected to, are experiencing this kind of devastation." ✨



Jeffrey Mackie-Deernsted, Archdeacon of the Klondike.



Maaike VanderMeer

Maaike's first poetry book, *Pin Bones*, is about fish (rainbow trout, arctic char and salmon). It's coming out in April 2027 and can be pre-ordered through bookstores!

WENDELL BERRY: REMEMBERING

This prophet of exile showed us how to secede from the empire we find ourselves in. | **Brian J. Walsh**

THE WENDELL BERRY BOOKS WERE TAKEN from their pride of place in our glass-fronted bookcase and piled around my favourite reading chair. Berry's essays, fiction and poetry have been a source of wisdom and vision for me since I first picked up *The Unsettling of America* half a lifetime ago. Hearing of his death at the age of 92 on August 31, 2026, I just needed to spend some more time with this man of place, community and land. This contrarian agrarian.

Not only am I so deeply indebted to Berry in shaping my worldview, but it is fair to say that Sylvia Keesmaat and I wouldn't have spent the last twenty-one years living, loving and tending our home and the land that surrounds us at Russet House Farm without his profound influence. In a secular world of self-reliant autonomy, Berry was a man of prayer. In a disenchanted world reduced to scientific explanation, Berry was grounded in a good creation birthed in love. In a world of propaganda and duplicity, Berry longed for truth. And in a world teetering between despair and cheap optimism, Berry was a prophet of hope.

**In a secular world of self-reliant autonomy,
Berry was a man of prayer.**

A MAN OF PRAYER

Revisiting Berry's writing, I wasn't surprised that I began with, and invariably returned to, the poem that functions as an epigraph to his short novel *Remembering*.

The poem begins:

Heavenly Muse, Spirit who brooded on
The world and raised it shapely out of nothing.
Touch my lips with fire and burn away
All dross of speech, so that I keep in mind
The truth and end to which my words now move
In hope.

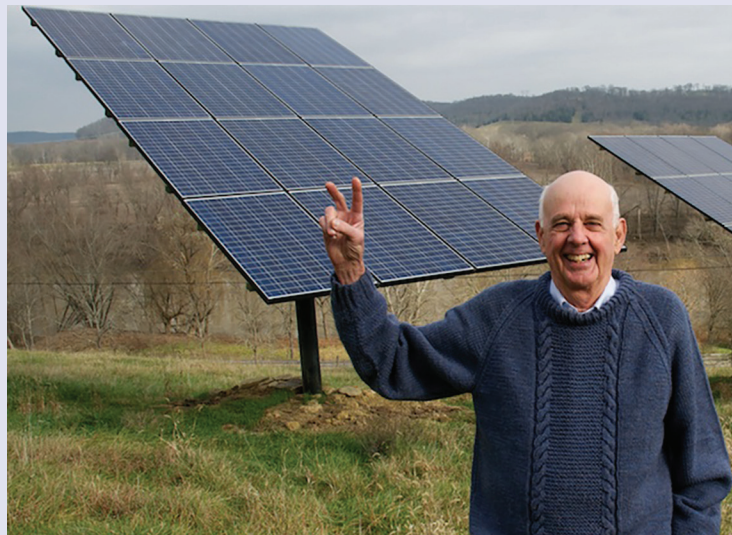
In these six lines of poetry the reader enters into the heart of Berry's vision and spirituality. Berry is praying to the very source of all creativity, the brooding Spirit who birthed creation. And, with echoes of Isaiah, he asks the Spirit to burn away all the deceitful dross of speech so that his words might be true and move in the direction of hope.

His prayer continues:

Keep me within that Mind
Of which it is a part, whose wholeness is
The hope and sense in what I tell. And though
I go among the scatterings of that sense,
The members of its worldly body broken,
Rule my sight by vision of the parts
Rejoined.

Here is another motif that runs throughout Berry's work. In the beginning is wholeness, but that wholeness is scattered and the "worldly body broken." The poet prays that this brooding Spirit would rule

A FARMER, POET AND PROPHET



Berry was born on August 5, 1934, in Louisville, Kentucky, and spent the majority of his life farming a plot of land about 85 kilometres from his hometown. He wrote 25 books of poetry, 16 essay collections and nine novels, many of which were set in the fictional town of Port William. Berry was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Obama in 2010.

Berry was well known for his refusal to adopt modern technologies. He sent handwritten letters on yellow legal paper instead of typing emails and relied on horses instead of tractors in his fields.

After visiting Berry in 2019, Bill Leuders, editor-at-large of *The Progressive*, a social justice magazine based in Wisconsin, says he and Berry exchanged letters and even discussed Donald Trump. "[Trump] seems to me to be limitless; there is no telling what he may do," wrote Berry. "I didn't know that such a man existed, or could exist. I suppose that is because such men normally disguise their infamy, but he boasts of his. And here I complete my agreement with you: I didn't know so many humans could admire such a man."

In a final letter to Leuders, dated July 30, Wendell wrote: "No doubt we must oppose Trump, but we must [not] do so by being in favour of what is not-Trump. We must not shrink ourselves to the littleness of Trump in order to oppose him."

his sight by a vision of the parts rejoined. Such a rejoining, such a reconciliation, such a making whole of that which has been divided requires care, affection, neighbourliness and hospitality.

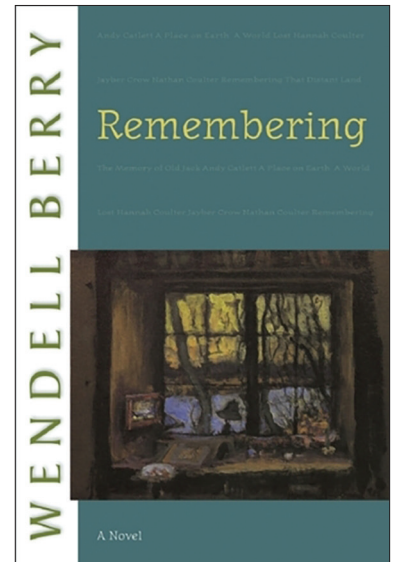
If it all begins with the Spirit brooding over a beautiful and generative creation, then it all ends with home. And so the poem concludes:

And in my exile's journey far
From home, be with me, so I may return.

A PROPHET OF EXILE

Berry is a prophet of exile, longing for and always pointing towards home. His argument against corporate agribusiness, global capitalism, industrialization and upward mobility is that it all creates a rootless monoculture that is spiritually, culturally, economically and agriculturally homeless. Western culture is in an exile of our own making. He explained this state of displacement in his 1992 book *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*, arguing that capitalism is "ready at any moment, by the means of power and wealth in the modern world, to destroy any place."

There will be no homecoming, Berry insists, apart from seceding from such a home-destroying empire. This is a secession of the imagination, refusing to allow the ubiquitous images of this home-wrecking culture to take us captive. It is an embodied secession, seeking alternative homemaking ways to live. And it is a spiritual secession, refusing to bow the knee to idols any more, and pledging our alle-



giance anew to the Creator who has been made flesh in our midst. The Redeemer of a good creation that was made to be home, and will be restored as home.

In his poem, "The Mad Farmer, Flying the Flag of Rough Branch, Secedes from the Union," Berry counsels:

From the union of self-gratification and self-annihilation,
secede into care for one another
and for the good gifts of Heaven and Earth.

Berry's words call us to move from the homelessness of self-gratification to the care for one another and creation. From the winners and losers of a culture of competition to the conviviality of community. From a culture of exploitation and greed to an economy of care. From a reduction of creation as resources for domination to a neighbourly attentiveness and kinship with all creatures. From a divisive, fragmenting culture of exclusion and xenophobia to an ethos and practice of radical hospitality. From the homelessness of our exilic condition to a homecoming in the good Kingdom of God.

Such was the vision, spirituality and hope of Wendell Berry. We remember him with deep, deep gratitude. ✨



Brian J. Walsh

Brian is an author, farmer and retired campus minister. You will find references to Wendell Berry in most of his books, including his most recent, *Of Prophets, Priests and Poets* (Cascade, 2025).

IS GETTING A HUMANITIES DEGREE STILL WORTH IT?

‘Absolutely,’ says author Brent van Staaldin. ‘There is a genuine benefit to our hyper-connected world in having people who know the whys and not just the hows.’ | **Isabelle Brown**



The University of Toronto has Canada's largest selection of humanities courses, with more than 4,000 students enrolled in 80 programs of study.

AS I ENTER THE FOURTH YEAR of my Bachelor of Arts in English Writing, people often ask me: “What do you hope to do after you graduate?” A reasonable question, one I have asked myself, but I don’t always have a direct answer. There are many things I could do after graduating. However, the focus of my education has been less on what job I will obtain, and more on just being educated.

Over the past two and a half decades, humanities programs in universities across Canada have been slowly shrinking by about 7,000 students per year while enrollment in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) and Business has increased. One factor could be that STEM and Business programs offer a simpler answer to the “what do you hope to do after graduating” question. Meanwhile, a degree in humanities – or a liberal arts education in general – is often not about securing a job in the workforce. The Canadian Encyclopedia defines a liberal arts education as a program of study in which the goals “are not those of vocational and professional training.”

Humanities and arts graduates are well prepared for the unexpected and can be better equipped to shift with the times.

A NIMBLE DEGREE

Best-selling author and lecturer at Redeemer University, Brent van Staaldin, told *CC*, “Those of us in the field [humanities] have long faced the nearsighted perception that an arts or humanities degree doesn’t have a direct connection to a career or well-paying job after graduation like specialty degrees in business or science.” Van Staaldin admitted that in some ways this can be true, “but it also ignores the well-documented reality that humanities and arts graduates are well prepared for the unexpected and can be better equipped to shift with the times.”

“Having exposure to and experience with a broad range of material, teaching approaches and course content, often provides a genuine advantage over mono-focused areas of study,” said van Staaldin.

Contemporary careers often demand workers who are nimble and can pivot to new challenges. For example, “an engineer who can read critically, a historian who gets basic physics, or a business person who understands philosophy and how people reason.”

“Is it still worth it? Absolutely,” stated van Staaldin. “There is a genuine benefit to our hyper-connected world in having people who know the ‘why’s and not just the ‘how’s.” He went on to say, “Ironically, despite the ever-expanding online universe of information to access and technologies to help us function, our hyper-dependence on connected things is actually forcing us to think smaller.” With the rise of artificial intelligence, “and its correlated dumbing-down of everyday skills and understandings, we need more humanity right now, more art, more social exploration, not less.”

HUMANITIES IN THE CHRISTIAN WALK

Al Wolters, retired professor emeritus of Religion and Theology at Redeemer University, told *CC* that the value of studying the humanities lies less in getting ahead in our competitive economic environment and more in “broadening one’s horizons and grappling with the big questions of human life as we pursue our calling.”

Wolters went on to say that from a Christian perspective, “the study of the humanities can be helpful in finding one’s way among the competing ideologies which claim our allegiance today.”

“A study of the humanities, especially philosophy, theology, history and languages is indispensable for discerning the spiritual depth dimension of human culture,” said Wolters, referring to both academic and non-academic spheres.



Brent van Staaldin.



Al Wolters.

“For example, to write a book such as the acclaimed *Political Visions & Illusions* by David T. Koyzis, emeritus professor of Political Science at Redeemer University, which analyzes political ideologies in terms of the biblical notion of creation and idolatry, would have been impossible without a solid grounding in the humanities.”

I would add that the humanities are needed when studying the Bible. The Bible is a literary work of art. It is filled with poetry, history, letters and songs. God has chosen to communicate with humanity through the words and thoughts of other people. To study his word, its cultural context, its timelessness and to see it as God expressing his heart to us, requires skills typically learned in humanities programs.

A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

Since the first universities were built, their purpose has been to ground students in “exploring what they want for their lives.” The humanities, in particular, help us understand the human experience, what humans have created across history, and why.

If you have ever enjoyed a good book or found a character that you relate to, then you have received one of the gifts of a humanities education: good writing. Writers have the skills to place what is thought, felt and seen into words, which connects us as humans. Perhaps it is no surprise that van Staaldin, who has just published his sixth book of fiction, *The Peace Thieves*, credits his success as an author to his education in English and Writing. “I use daily the skills and understandings gained in my liberal arts education,” he said.

To be able to place life and humanity into words, songs and pic-

tures for others to see themselves in is needed in our world today. Social media pushes out content like fast fashion, bombarding us from every side, and what we need now more than ever is people who seek to uphold not only beauty, but also truth.

In an essay written by Christopher Derrick, called *Escape from Scepticism: Liberal Education as if Truth Mattered*, he states in a chapter called “Education for Freedom,” that someone who obtains a liberal education is encouraged to develop themselves more fully as a man or woman. They will be “well-read, informed, sensitive” and have “some apprehension of the fine arts, some understanding of the world and its history and its problems.” Their sympathies will be broad and their mind tolerant. “If there arises some question of the public or political kind,” they will bring to the discussion “something better than mere prejudice and self-interest.” They will have “some skill in the difficult arts of reading and writing and thinking,” and they “will have inner resources.” They will be someone “worth talking to.”

A liberal arts education is not about getting a job or receiving job training. It is, in fact, far more rewarding. It is about developing an inner life. To read books, to think about things and to form a well-rounded opinion. It prepares you for life and makes you someone “worth talking to.”



Isabelle Brown

Isabelle is a freelance writer currently studying English, writing and art at Redeemer University. In her free time, she likes to play sports, go on walks and enjoy the outdoors.

CREATION THROUGH THE EYES OF FIVE ARTISTS

Redeemer University's art gallery starts a new chapter with the *The Book of Nature* exhibition. | [Melia Cooper](#)

REDEEMER'S ART GALLERY IS REOPENING after summer renovations with the exhibit *The Book of Nature*, featuring five artists' work inspired by God's creation. The exhibit includes oil paintings, textile art, woodcut prints, cyanotype images and mixed media artwork incorporating found objects.

BULLET HOLES IN THE SKY

"*The Book of Nature* means, for me, the natural world," Oshawa-based artist and Redeemer professor Wes Peel told *Christian Courier*. Peel's art pieces feature distorted cyanotype landscapes, "I'm talking about plants, animals, water, air and sky – physical and biological processes that would continue even if humans didn't exist on earth."

Peel's cyanotype landscapes have been weathered; some have been torn, overlaid with black-light fluid, punctured by bullets and sewn back together with thread. "The bullet holes are real, not just representations. I took my work to a gun range. And it raised a few eyebrows."

Through the process of breaking and mending, Peel's artwork represents nature's vulnerability and resilience. He leaves some bullet holes untouched, while he "mends" others with gold leaf, signifying that "healing and repair in nature is an ongoing process."

Like Peel, Arizona-based artist Cheryl Hochberg sees the theme *The Book of Nature* as the key to understanding her artwork. "My process has always felt mystical, because I am so often surprised by what I 'hear' and am taught, realizing that it is not of my own thinking or making."

Hochberg's art combines woodcut printing with photographs and is influenced by her time in the Sonoran Desert, China and New Jersey. "I try to set aside my own expectations and listen to what story each location has to tell."



IN MEMORY OF WILHELMINA

Redeemer University was able to renovate their art gallery due to a generous donation by the estate of the late artist, Wilhelmina Kennedy (1933-2025). Kennedy's artwork is also on display, and the themes in her work inspired the exhibition's direction and title. During her life, Kennedy drew inspiration from God's creation. Her oil paintings are deeply rooted in her faith, drawing on the idea of seeing "God with us" in both scripture and nature. Her work features architectural details such as pillars, windows and arches symbolic of God's presence, overlooking dark, cold landscape views – leading the viewer to examine how God's word can be revealed through nature.

The title of the exhibit, *The Book of Nature*, comes from the theologian and philosopher St. Augustine, who believed that God could be known not only through written scripture but also through His Creation. *The Book of Nature* will be open at Redeemer University until October 22.



Jackie Partridge's art gives new meaning to old maps and atlases.

HEALED BY MAPS

Grinding, cutting, ripping, mulling, tearing and mending are just some of the creative processes used by the five artists on exhibition. "I see a strong connection between my process and the symbolism of it and the final artwork itself," explained Jackie Partridge, a mixed-media artist from rural Waterloo region. To create her artwork titled "Patched," she blended map paper into a pulp and used it to "mend" trees whose bark had peeled away. "In that work in particular, the process is about mending, healing the tree, and giving the paper back to the tree almost like an offering."

Her work is not only about the process, but also the materials she chooses, such as old maps and atlases that would otherwise be thrown away. In doing so, she strips them of their original meaning and gives them a new one. "I'm giving it a second life. I'm giving it another chance. I am allowing people to see the beauty in it."



"Lilies in a watery wasteland" by Diana Scholtens (recycled denim jeans, glue, wire, ColourVie pigments, thread painting).



"Fungal Clerestory" by Diana Scholtens (hand-dyed indigo, inkjet printer, thread painting, Derwent Inktense pencils on recycled cotton). "This piece was based on a photo taken on one of our many family walks," says Scholtens. "The forests and fields and wild spaces remind us to care for this earthly garden in which we live and breathe."

RECYCLED LILIES

"I am deeply conscious that the stewardship of creation is central to humanity's identity as God's image-bearers," says Diana Scholtens, a textile artist from Hamilton who works predominantly with recycled and repurposed fabrics. "By carefully selecting my materials and scale, I limit the consumption of new resources while transforming the old into something entirely new."

Diana Scholtens' work in the Redeemer gallery features beautiful textile works of nature scenes, such as birds, leaves and water lilies. "By revealing the often-unnoticed aspects of existence, I hope to help viewers slow down, appreciate the everyday beauty we easily miss, and turn their hearts toward the God who made it all."

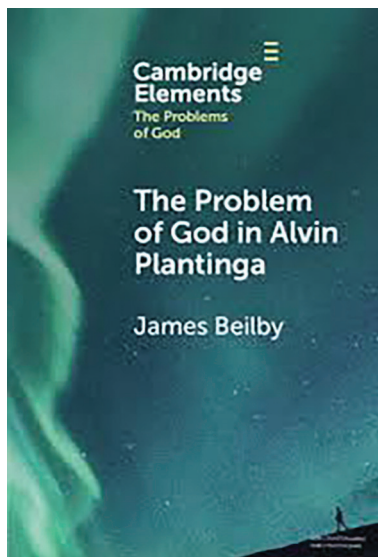


"Patched" by Jackie Partridge (handmade map paper embedded on tree).



Melia Cooper

Melia is an artist, writer and Redeemer University graduate. You can find her art on Instagram @melias.artt.



THE PROBLEM OF GOD IN ALVIN PLANTINGA

James Beilby

Cambridge University Press, 2026.

ALVIN PLANTINGA'S 'BIZZARE CLAIMS'

Neil Lettinga

ALVIN PLANTINGA, ARGUABLY NORTH AMERICA'S preeminent reformed philosopher, is the subject of a lively study, *The Problem of God in Alvin Plantinga*. Plantinga leveraged reformed perspectives in a broader academic world.

His comfort with the American academic universe began early. As a first year Calvin student, Plantinga won a major scholarship to Harvard. With Dutch immigrant frugality, he decided to accept. However, visiting Calvin on a break, Plantinga heard William Jellema teach a philosophy class and was captivated. This was the approach he wanted to pursue. So, leaving Harvard, he returned to Calvin to finish his undergraduate philosophy degree.

He then pursued graduate and postgrad work at various American schools where he found bemused acceptance, curiosity about his convictions and lively conversations. He discovered a congenial community of philosophical friends, most neither reformed nor Christian.

His Kuyperian bent convinced him that Christian philosophers should not restrict themselves to topics and methods preferred by secular academics, but think about issues of interest to Christians. This led to lifelong philosophical inquiries about knowledge and belief, and the relationship between the two. Combining a reformed approach to philosophical questions and a commitment to a congenial secular philosophical community gave him a long, productive career of clear, careful thinking.

BOLD ASSERTIONS

His first major work, *God and Other Minds*, famously argued that belief in God's existence is no less reasonable than belief in the existence of any mind other than your own. He developed his defense of faith in a multi-volume study, culminating in *Warranted Christian Belief*. He concluded that for Christians, belief in God may be rooted in knowing God and needs no external rational justification or valida-

tion. Belief in God and belief in the laws of logic are not all that different.

In later years Plantinga focused more on the relationship between scientific knowledge and Christian belief, arguing that apparent conflict between evolutionary theory and Christian belief is superficial: deep harmony exists between the two. Examined closely, the evolutionary model *undermines* a naturalistic, materialistic worldview. The kernel of his argument is that random evolution has a low probability of producing a mind which entertains *true* (as opposed to convenient) beliefs. The entire scientific project depends on a reliable rationality that willingly plows through convenient false beliefs to seek inconvenient and even risky truth.

Plantinga's bold assertions, carefully and convincingly reasoned, transformed philosophical conversation in North American and British universities. His tenacious approach not only brought reformed thinking well beyond

the immigrant subculture, it also earned a new philosophical lexicon term: "to alvinize. v. *To stimulate protracted discussion by making a bizarre claim.*"

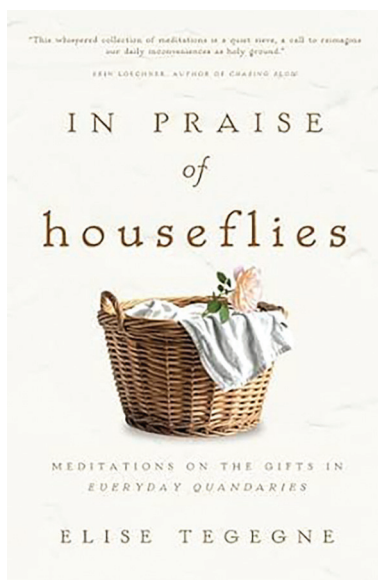
His winsome personality and brilliant thinking won him philosophical friends and admirers. Years of teaching at Calvin and then Notre Dame produced a new generation of Christian philosophers scattered throughout North American academia.

James Beilby quotes Kelly Clark, "In the 1950s there was not a single published defense of religious belief by a prominent philosopher; by the 1990s there were literally hundreds . . . The difference between 1950 and 1990 is, quite simply, Alvin Plantinga." ➤



Neil Lettinga

Neil and his wife, Virginia, have worked as history professors, campus chaplains and specialized transitional ministers. Currently, they live in Victoria, B.C.



IN PRAISE OF HOUSEFLIES – MEDITATIONS ON THE GIFTS OF EVERYDAY QUANDARIES

Elise Teegne

Calla Press, 2025.

A PERFECTIONIST MEETS HOUSEFLIES

Heidi VanderSlikke

EVER BEEN GRATEFUL FOR HOUSEFLIES? Me neither! Living on a farm most of my life, I know houseflies and was never once glad to see them. So, the title of Elise Teegne's book intrigued me – *In Praise of Houseflies*. I hoped it wasn't some shallow assortment of Pollyanna musings. To my delight, it was anything but.

This slim, lyrical volume takes a brutally honest look at mundane, everyday vexations and challenges. Elise Teegne employs exquisitely poignant imagery and succeeds beautifully in her self-assigned mandate: "Rather than paint over pain with sunny hues, I've tried to look it full in the face. And in looking (closely, carefully), I've found glimmers of grace there."

TOUGH QUESTIONS

Essays are organized around Teegne's life – years as a missionary teaching French in Ethiopia; the pandemic; early marriage and motherhood. Open and vulnerable, she examines heart-wrenching loneliness, pain, boredom, cleaning and sleep deprivation. Her faith-filled worldview emerges and implicitly attests to God's ability to work all things for good.

We meet Teegne as a summa cum laude graduate, an introvert, a perfectionist who excels at pretty much everything – academics, arts, athletics. She begins her career as a missionary teacher and quickly finds students unimpressed with her accomplishments and accolades. Clever and intelligent, they make light work of her pride. She writes,

"I was not used to failing with such gusto."

The experience prompts tough, soul-searching questions. "Why is it so hard to accept my own mediocrity? Why must I insist on being glorified, a goddess in a universe of my own making? Even the God who made the universe gave up all his throne-room glory." She begins exploring the difference between humility and humiliation. "And how sweet the balm to my perfectionism-chapped soul, when at last I can receive God's grace, give grace to myself."

A BOOK TO LINGER OVER

I was hungry to devour each essay quickly, but recognized it would be a shame not to linger over every page. This is a rare book I will likely read again.

I'd still rather swat flies than ponder their spiritual significance. But I take her point that God often sends "daily annoyances" to interrupt tidy agendas. It's to our benefit – whether or not we recognize that fact.

"My hours are not my own," she writes. I should embroider that on a pillowcase.

Teegne graciously invites us "to pause, take a deep breath, and attune your spirit to God as you open these pages," it is an invitation well worth accepting. ➤



Heidi VanderSlikke

Heidi has been writing for Christian Courier since the turn of the century. She enjoys motorcycles, time outdoors and daily walks with her dog, Norton.

PHILOSOPHICAL POETRY THAT CHALLENGES

Sandy Ayer

FIREFLY FULFILLS ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN POET KEVIN HART'S longstanding desire to publish "a long book of poems each . . . in nine tercets." The first poem "Rain," has some challenging metaphors ("Ghost rain when poor men marry, ravens too"), serving notice that *Firefly* takes work to read. But it then unfolds into an engaging poem about the limits of human knowledge – even such everyday phenomena as rain eludes true understanding.

UNFAMILIAR HISTORIES

Philosophical themes show up. (Hart teaches theology and philosophy.) Read *Firefly* slowly with Wikipedia open, since Hart's poems are often grounded in unfamiliar history and geography. His autobiographical "1954", my favorite poem from the collection, has over a dozen historical references, including cleverly linking Ho Chi Minh to the French version of "Rock Around the Clock."

Firefly has instances of humour. One poem runs wild with a message he saw on a malfunctioning electronic monitor, "Weather Conditions May Cause Escalators": "Ascetics in the desert peering up, / *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* in hand . . . / Only to find a staircase at their feet." Or the gallows humor of "The Suggestion Box in Hell": "Why not install a tanning bed in here!"

Firefly poems embrace life's joys unsentimentally and face sorrows bravely. Death or loss lurk in the background, from the lighter "They Say" ("They say that it's a snap when death swings by") to the outright menace of "Mister Wolf" ("You've eaten all the sunlight, Mister Wolf / It's blazing in your eyes for all to see"). The poet addresses death directly, something inevitable but not ultimately

victorious. Hart's Christian hope is understated: God, angels and saints show up from time to time but never preach.

Firefly concludes with "Flash- es," a chapter of 13 imaginative poems inspired by the fifth thesis of Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History," which begins, "The true picture of the past flits by." Hence "The Trojan War Will Not Take Place," because, among other things, "there's not enough Old growth around Troy / To make a wooden mouse;" and "The New Uz," which features a Job-inspired theme park, "archive of all modes of suffering," complete with a boils machine, is now relocated to a Nevada desert.

ESPRESSO FOR THE SOUL

God shows up more often and more explicitly in *Carnets*, 600 aphorisms distributed among 12 chapters: "Once you believe in

God everything praises him," "Christ's peace breaks us into pieces" and "We pass from likeness to likeness, not from god to God."

Philosophy also shines: "Philosophy: running a comb through unruly ideas"; "Philosophy helps theology to be itself."

CC readers will love this: "A Calvinist hope: The bleak shall inherit the earth." These pithy sayings get reflection going, which is the book's purpose: "Aphorisms – espresso for the soul." 🐦



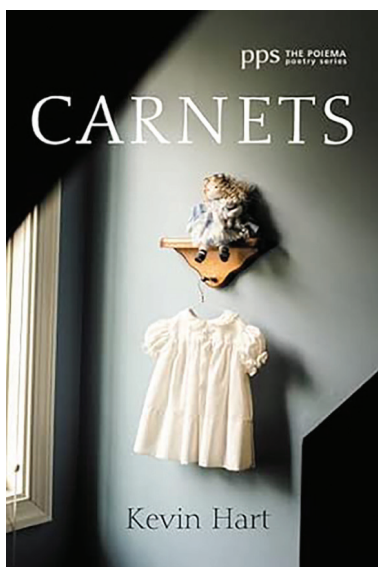
H.D. Sandy Ayer

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



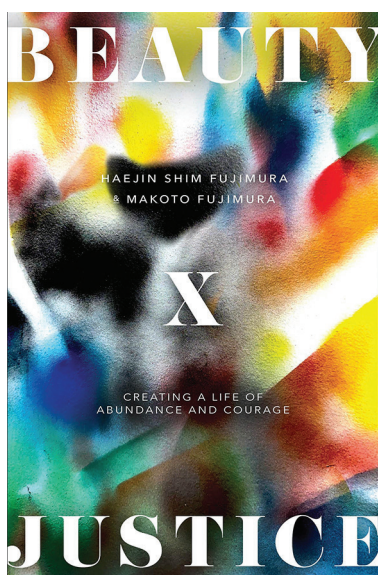
FIREFLY

Kevin Hart
Pitt Street Poetry, 2026.



CARNETS

Kevin Hart
Cascade Books, 2025.



BEAUTY AND JUSTICE: CREATING A LIFE OF ABUNDANCE AND COURAGE

Haejin Shim Fujimura
and Makoto Fujimura
Brazos, 2026.

CO-AUTHORS BRIDGE LAW AND ART

John Medendorp

READING *BEAUTY AND JUSTICE* is like walking through an art gallery. Each paragraph has the potential to capture one's imagination, causing one to linger before moving to the next piece.

Makoto Fujimura, the artist, partners with his wife Haejin Shim Fujimura, the lawyer. This is a winsome picture of two lives and vocations joining.

They understand the work of beauty and justice in light of Christ's gospel as *kintsugi*: taking what is broken by sin then carefully joining fractured pieces to re-create the original work, one more lovely and valuable by being repaired than it would be if it was never broken.

They lay out ideological, theological, relational and cultural convictions that led them to their respective fields. They consider biblical concepts of *mishpat* and *tsedaqah*, "justice" and "righteousness," as central to both the Christian vision of the New Creation and the life of discipleship. They explore cultivating room for possibility. Haejin uses the image of an estuary for creating fragile liminal spaces which require intentional conservation. ("Estuary" is also the name of her nonprofit collaborative, which houses diverse partners: a law firm, a justice NGO, a global art collaborative, a culture care group, a peace-making agency and an art gallery.)

ABUNDANCE

Exploring their healing after the 9/11 terror attacks, the covid pandemic, family challenges and professional disillusionment, the authors emphasize the importance of art, creativity, catharsis and community. They call us to trust in God's abundance in a scarcity culture, allowing

grace to overflow in our lives and work. The Christian *discipline* of giving thanks in the midst of suffering sustains believers in their calling by keeping hearts close to God. Our vocation cultivates hope and confidence for the next generation. Haejin shares the in-

ern-day slavery offers an illuminating and sobering perspective on what is now a political cause célèbre plagued by misinformation and ignorance.

At times the book feels self-promotional: highlighting the authors' nonprofits, lauding

This is a winsome picture of two lives and vocations joining.

spiring story of working in India, empowering children in one of the country's poorest and most oppressive neighbourhoods. The authors conclude with a renewed gospel vision for both law and art: setting the world right, confident in what Christ has accomplished.

This inspiring work weaves together and between the genres of memoir, manifesto and theological reflection. Haejin's personal familiarity with the topic of mod-

their approaches to management and professional development. But this is a minor flaw. Overall, this offers a compelling vision for both law and art that pursue and point to the coming kingdom of shalom. 🐦



John Medendorp

John is a pastor at New Era Christian Reformed Church in New Era, Michigan.



A "chosen family" is a group of friends who commit to caring for one another and gathering regularly like a biological family might.

Beth Carlson Malena

WEDNESDAY DINNER

Ordinary hospitality that works. | [Beth Carlson Malena](#)

IT'S WEDNESDAY, which means that tonight, a group of ten of my friends will sit around our table for Wednesday Dinner. My wife and I will barbecue burgers and ultra-sweet Chilliwack corn; other friends will provide salad, drinks and dessert.

Our house will not be spotless, and we'll likely still be cooking when they arrive, so some of them will have to set the table. We have lowered our expectations of perfect hosting and redirected that energy into making sure everyone in the group feels seen and included. This means finding alternate burgers and buns for friends with dietary restrictions, and fetching the box of toys so the kids know this is a space where

they belong.

We have a haphazard planning system. Every week, by Tuesday, someone will hopefully message the group chat to say they can host or to suggest we meet in a park or on a beach, if it's warm enough here in Vancouver. That person might also offer to provide the main course, though they also know they're allowed to host without cooking. The rest of us will check our pantries and fridges to see what we can add to the meal, or we'll ask what we can grab from the store on our way. Contributing food is not a prerequisite for attendance; sometimes getting your own self to that table is all you can do, and it's enough. It's weekly, ordinary hospitality, and it works for us.

CRAVING COMMUNITY

Wednesday Dinner started in 2011 with my wife and three of her friends. They were at various stages in their coming out journeys, and they no longer felt welcome to bring their full queer selves to church. They craved a regular practice of community akin to a midweek "home group" or "small group" meeting, and they figured they didn't need the church to engineer it, so they began cooking and eating together every Wednesday night. They would make a point of inviting each person around the table to share one high point and one low point from their week.

In the fifteen years since, much has changed. My wife and I moved away to Toronto, then moved back to Vancouver. Housemates have cycled in and out of the group. We've met and welcomed new romantic partners; we've witnessed marriages and separations. Two wonderful children were born. And through

it all, versions of this group have continued to meet on Wednesdays for a meal in someone's home.

CHOSEN FAMILY

Queer people no longer form the majority at Wednesday Dinner, but the concept of "queer chosen family" remains the heart of the gathering. I've also heard it called "found family," "framily" (friends who form family), or "logical family" (as opposed to biological family). While queer folks aren't the only ones who pursue deep relationships beyond bloodlines, we do tend to have more motivation to do so, with high rates of biological family rejection and less resonance with the heteronormative concept of nuclear family. Rather than forming kinship bonds around legal categories and circumstances of birth, we forge them around shared values, shared experiences, trust and love.

For some people, queer chosen family can be a matter of

life and death. Some Indigenous queer people have practiced this for centuries, including Hijra communities in India, who live together at the margins of society, with their own hierarchical lineages and kinship structures. The groundbreaking film *Paris is Burning* documents ball culture in 1980s New York, especially among Black and Latinx queer people, where leaders and mentors would assume the titles of Mothers and Fathers, and would welcome homeless queer youth to join their houses, take shelter, and compete alongside them.

Some of these historic houses have legacies that continue into the present day.

In the 80s and 90s, the HIV/AIDS epidemic ravaged the queer community, infecting a large proportion of gay men. When their families and churches abandoned them in shame and fear, the lesbian community stood in the gap, raising funds, doing blood drives, organizing food and hous-

ing, and offering hospice care. In recognition for their solidarity, queer people began rearranging their acronym from “GLBT” to “LGBT,” moving the lesbians to the front.

Today, many of us cisgender queer people are organizing to

sources and support during the coming out process, especially when we lose jobs, homes or relationships in the process. Some of us add children to our chosen families through fostering, adoption or offering a room to someone who’s been kicked out after

wildly diverse early church was a family that grew not primarily through childbirth, but rather through grafting Gentiles into the sacred community. I love verses like Isaiah 56:8 where God says, “I will gather still others to them beyond those already gathered,” and John 10:16, where Jesus says: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also.” We worship a God who is always at work gathering more outsiders into the fold. By collecting those pushed to the edges, like a bag with a string woven around its perimeter, God also collects those in the middle.

My favourite example of God’s radical hospitality is the unfolding story of eunuchs in scripture. Although attempts to map eunuchs directly onto today’s LGBTQ+ spectrum yield no straightforward results (pun intended!), as castrated and/or impotent humans, eunuchs were the most recognizable sexual and gender minorities of their time.

Deuteronomy 23:1 tells us that eunuchs were initially banned from the temple, likely because of their association with practices deemed idolatrous in the temples of surrounding nations. That blanket legal prohibition makes Isaiah 56 all the more startling. In this prophetic text, eunuchs who serve God are welcomed back into the temple where, despite being unable to conceive children, they are promised an enduring family name.

Then in Matthew 19, Jesus further honours eunuchs by counting himself among their ranks, with his choice to be a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven. Finally, in Acts 8, the Spirit whisks Philip directly into the path of an Ethiopian eunuch, and Philip welcomes this eunuch as one of the first baptized converts of the early church. Following the storyline of eunuchs in the Bible gives us a clear example of the radical hospitality of the Spirit toward those whose gender or sexuality doesn’t fit the norm.

MAKING SPACE

Just as God makes room for eunuchs around the dinner table, we’re challenging ourselves to keep making space for “the other.” We shelter queer teens who are forced out by Christian parents who believe they are prac-

coming out. If we’re especially lucky, church can be a place to find chosen family, though it’s still more common for churches to be sites of queer rejection.

GOD’S CHOSEN FAMILY

It is ironic that ostracism from Christian families and churches is what forces some queer people to practice the very kind of “chosen family hospitality” that God practices. God’s family is not primarily a blood family, but an adoptive family, a family where God consistently shows hospitality to outsiders.

God blesses Israel so they can bless other nations and widens the tent to embrace people like Naaman, Ruth and Rahab, some of whom become Jesus’ ancestors.

Jesus follows the pattern, drawing a motley crew of disciples as his chosen family, and sending them to the ends of the earth to launch the church. This

God’s family is not primarily a blood family, but an adoptive family, a family where God consistently shows hospitality to outsiders.

protect and advocate for our trans siblings, whose rights are under threat. Their “transcestors” were among the first to stand up to the police at the Stonewall Inn in that pivotal moment for queer rights fifty-seven years ago, and now we stand up for them.

EMOTIONAL LIFELINES

Even when it’s not about physical survival, chosen family can be an emotional lifeline over the course of our queer journeys. Finding queer chosen family is often easier to do in larger cities; for those in smaller or more isolated communities, the internet is a gift: connecting them to queer people in other places. Some of us seek out queer elders and siblings even before we come out; they become possibility models and remind us of our worth, helping chip away at our internalized queerphobia.

Chosen family can provide re-



Setting a table to ensure everyone feels seen and included.

tic “tough love.” We step in as queer aunts, “guncles,” (gay uncles) and “piblings/unties/auncles,” (non-binary terms for “parent’s sibling” or combinations of “aunt and uncle”), finding beautiful roles as safe adults and mentors in the lives of other people’s kids. We build friendships with unlikely people, responding to all kinds of needs, even among our so-called enemies, conveying the wide welcome of God through our diverse intersectional community, woven together with the threads of God’s unconditional love.

Our Wednesday Dinner community has consistently shown up for one another, for better and for worse. When one of us got married this year, the rest of us pitched in as officiants, wedding band members and bartenders. A few years ago, when my mom died suddenly, some of them were on our doorstep that very evening with food and quiet presence.

When we discovered we had different expectations about the regularity of everyone’s Wednesday night attendance, we talked our way through the conflict. We taught ourselves to use new pronouns for one group member. We flexed to make room for animal guessing games with the kids during dinner, even if it means we don’t have time to hear everyone’s highs and lows of the week. We even managed to learn to cook some dishes that are gluten-free, lactose-free AND vegetarian.

RADICAL HOSPITALITY

Having survived all of this, I think we might last a very long time. I think we might be chosen family.

Again, I don’t believe you need to be queer to try out “chosen family” hospitality, or to start your own equivalent of Wednesday Dinner. Anyone following the way of a radically hospitable God will necessarily receive divine invitations to widen their tent and table. When you do, will you humbly seek the wisdom of the queer community in your practice of hospitality? We have a lot to offer the church. Some of us have skills in communication, setting healthy boundaries and resolving conflicts. Some of us have learned what it means to name harm, to forgive and to repair. Some of us can narrate in great detail what it feels like to be excluded and what it looks like to become an includer. And some of us have a veggie burger recipe to share.

Will you save a seat at the table for us? 🍷



Beth Carlson Malena

Beth is the co-pastor of Open Way Community Church in Vancouver (unceded Coast Salish land) and the founder of Pride + Joy Ceremonies. She spends her free time birdwatching, giving botany tours at Van Dusen Gardens and organizing for climate justice and a free Palestine.



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BIRDS ON A WIRE

Look at this branch they made for us.
So what if they forgot the leaves?
We can always build a nest somewhere else.
You have to love the fact
that it joins one tree to the next,
and that it lies perfectly straight.
They always seem to be trying
to improve on what God provided us.
At least it's easier to feel the sun,
and nothing gets in the breeze's way.
Let's sit here for a little while longer.
It would be almost impolite not to. 🐦



Shane Schick

Shane has had poems published in Heart of Flesh Literary Journal, The ClayJar Review, Traces Journal and many other publications. He lives with his wife, an Anglican priest, and their three children in Whitby, Ont. More: ShaneSchick.com/Poetry. Twitter/X: @ShaneSchick

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Located in southern Saskatchewan, Grace is a photographer, graphic designer and illustrator. She works primarily in watercolour pencil, with a current focus on birds. She also enjoys reading, camping and training her rescue dog, Argo. You can find her on Instagram: @_grace_nation_

I'D RATHER NOT BE IN THE WILDERNESS



Curt Gesch | cgesch63@gmail.com

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

PERSONALLY, I AM not a wilderness person. I am scared of the big country, can't hike because of age and inclination, and don't want to shoot a moose or bear. I like to see them move through our fields, forest and fen when they are not causing problems for the garden or chicken coop.

I like gardening, raising a few Dexter cattle in rotationally grazed pastures and getting my hay from our lessee (except occasionally when we make a haystack just to remind ourselves of the olden times). I enjoy our conservation easement (about 80 acres of wetland) even though I

cannot walk through it most of the time.

GARDEN JOYS

But perhaps most of all, I enjoy having as much garden as I can

**I try my best to live
in my garden, on
the land.**

handle and then some more, even when it means hiring student helpers or neighbourhood children. I enjoy having my own manure supply to compost or spread directly. I enjoy trying out new



Nature-journalist Sandra Stanley's rendition of the Gesch hay barn. Used with permission.

crops on a tiny scale in our Experimental Garden – crops like industrial hemp, phacelia, fenugreek, two-year-old fall rye plots, hull-less oats, fava beans and new “forage cocktails.”

I love having the room to plant clumps of plants (instead of long, perfectly straight rows) throughout the garden, a crazy quilt of usefulness and “just beauty.” I like sharing food that I don't like to eat but

love to give away. And when our relatively short growing season is done, I like leaving some plants standing: hemp, sunflowers, flower stalks, currants and haskaps. These are for the birds in winter and to break the white expanse of a snow-covered garden.

FOR LIFE

I try my best to live in my garden, on the land. I don't want to

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.

May I live in your mercy
between the desert and the sown,
the wilderness and the town
for a reasonably long time
and forever in your house
with more swallows
than sparrows.

own a farm but to inhabit a place, a unique place. Best-as-I-can, I want to tend it for people, for wildlife, for water and plant life.

I dread the thought of being put in a room, or a subdivision or near a shopping centre – somewhere with a flowerbox or container garden, hearing traffic and music blasting from speakers day and night. The day will come, but until then I'd rather live somewhere between the desert and the sown, between the wilderness and the suburbs, in the agricultural world but also of it. 🐦

MIGRANT RIGHTS



Michael DeMoor | Michael.DeMoor@kingsu.ca

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

IN CASE YOU haven't heard (that's a joke, of course you've heard), Alberta is holding a referendum this month. The most high-profile question Albertans are being asked concerns whether or not the Government of Alberta should initiate the legal process of holding a binding referendum on separating from Canada (whatever exactly that means; the Constitution says virtually nothing about any legal basis for a province actually separating from Canada, and even the Supreme Court's reference and the Clarity Act are very unclear about it).

But there are other very important questions. We Albertans are going to be asked whether non-permanent legal immigrants in Alberta should be eligible for provincial services (including schooling and

healthcare), whether they should be required to wait 12 months before being eligible for these services, and whether they should have to pay a fee or premium for them over

There are downsides to the rhetoric of hospitality.

and above the provincial taxes they already pay. (Currently, non-permanent residents who work in the province pay taxes at exactly the same rates as everyone else.)

There's a lot that's wrong with these questions, including the fact that, whatever fiscal challenges Alberta faces in paying for provincial services, the impact of non-permanent residents on those services is minimal. But there's

a deeper problem and it's in what these questions reflect about our fundamental attitudes toward migrants and "our" land.

NOT OUR LAND

Christians who advocate for migrants' interests often use the language of hospitality to connect their work and their faith. The mandate to treat "strangers" or "wayfarers" as one of your own is a frequent refrain throughout scripture, from Leviticus 19:34 to Matthew 25:35 to Hebrews 13:2 (to name but a few). But there are downsides to the rhetoric of hospitality when thinking about the rights of migrants in Canada and our duties toward them.

First, it seems to make the question of welcoming the stranger a matter of generosity rather than rights. I don't think this is what scripture actually implies, but we tend to think of hospitality as a sort of kindness moved by warm feelings rather than a matter of people's rights and our basic obligations toward them. Treating migrants fairly and well shouldn't be something we do merely because we're nice and generous, lest we feel justified



in withdrawing that treatment when times get tough for us; "we'd love to share, but there just isn't enough to go around; no hard feelings!"

Most importantly, when it comes to the Alberta referendum, this rhetoric of hospitality can lead us to think that our own right to the land and its resources (from which we fund "our" services) is straightforward and uncontested. It can lead us to think that we are masters and unchallengeable owners of this place to do with as we please.

But that's doubly problematic.

Anywhere we are, we are stewards on behalf of the Creator whose world (and hence whose land) this is (Lev. 25). And for those of us who are settlers here in Alberta, our own "right" to be on this land is premised on our treaty relationship with Indigenous peoples. This land and its riches are not simply "ours" to give or withhold at will; it's not our ball – we cannot just pick it up and take it home when we don't like the way the game is going. Let's keep these things in mind as we look at the Alberta referendum questions. [✚](#)

FAST-TRACK TO WHAT?



Kathy Vandergrift | kathyvandergrift@rogers.com

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

IT IS FASHIONABLE these days for political leaders to talk about cutting red tape and building fast. There is little discussion about what is being lost in the drive for rapid development of major projects. A closer look behind the scenes suggests citizens should hold up a "Slow Down" sign because they will pay for the rush in many ways and for a long time.

In July, a federal discussion paper, "Getting Major Projects Built in Canada," raised concerns about due process in how the Building Canada Act will be implemented. Not long after that, on August 1, the West Coast Pipeline Project was officially listed as a potential nation-building project with a short, vague public consultation open

until September 18 and a decision by October 1. On August 28, the Robert Banks Terminal 2 Project and the Mackenzie Valley Highway were added to the list, again

This path will erode public trust in government decisions.

with limited public consultation until October 1. Once a project is designated "of national interest," the expedited approval process in the discussion paper kicks in. Legislation to make this charade legal is expected as soon as Parliament resumes. Provinces are following the same trend toward quick approval

processes. I hope Canadians push aside slogans about fast-tracking, big dollar signs and promised jobs to consider more substantive issues that will affect Canada long after the current trade war, which is used to justify shortcuts.

What is being lost are the essential tools of good governance that prevent the kind of abuse of power and autocratic rule we now see south of the border. Trust in Mark Carney or Pierre Poilievre right now does not justify making it easy for an autocratic leader to seize near-absolute power in the future. This path will erode public trust in government decisions, which is already low.

NOT MERELY RED TAPE

Three big red flags stick out of a host of technical concerns. First is the loss of reasonable impact assessment. Whether one favours a pipeline or not, evidence of its impacts on creation and public health should be considered before approval, not afterward. Environmental assessments are not red tape. Think back to Grassy Narrows and



the cost in human lives and health from the failure to consider the impacts of allowing mercury to pollute the water in order to fast-track a paper mill.

Second is the loss of a thorough cost-benefit analysis. When billions of taxpayer dollars are spent, the public has a right to know that existing evidence about full costs and alternative options was seriously considered, to be assured that this is the best use of resources. Haste makes waste.

Third is the loss of checks and balances, transparency and public accountability. In order to save time, the same minister will champion a project, fund it, approve it,

decide what conditions will be put on it and manage its implementation. This violates the most basic principles of good governance and it invites corruption.

There will be consultation with Indigenous peoples because it is legally required. But it should not be up to Indigenous people alone to stand up and protect water, air and public health that all citizens need, including future generations.

Development does not have to come at the expense of care for creation. Protecting the public interest requires due process. There is still time to pull in the reins and use a responsible process rather than focusing on speed alone. [✚](#)

ENFORCED NEUTRALITY IN THE MILITARY



Matthijs Kronemeijer | mkronemeijer+cc@gmail.com

Matthijs trained as a pastor in the Netherlands. He moved to Canada in 2020 after six years in Michigan, where he studied politics and worked for a community college. He now lives in Toronto.

ONE OF MY tasks at the Dutch military chaplaincy, almost two decades ago, involved sitting on a committee to advise on religious celebrations. It is not a task I remember fondly, because it was a

ing the Catholic values at stake. Curaçao is historically Catholic and Catholic traditions shape the culture of the island, so our side argued those should be followed, especially on Christmas Day. Oth-

**Authenticity, to stand for your values,
is essential to avoid moral injury in the
military.**

loaded topic. Not long before our meetings started, an incident during a Christmas celebration on the island of Curaçao caused deep divisions within the chaplaincy, and a lot of pain besides.

Looking back, there was something surreal and even tragicomic about the incident and the protracted conflict that followed. I dutifully did my part in uphold-

ers had a different perspective, stressing that all chaplains were working on an equal basis for the military on the taxpayer's dime. Which was also true.

Another memory of my time at the chaplaincy was reading the chaplain's manual of the Canadian Armed Forces. I was a bit more experienced then and was impressed with the completeness, clarity and

thoughtfulness of the document. I noticed that in Canada faith organizations jointly endorse all chaplains; they do not just endorse their own, as we Dutch did. And that was certainly one of the causes of our perennial conflicts.

Which brings me to the present. At the height of summer, the Canadian Armed Forces released a new instruction that bans chaplains from offering prayers in public settings. References to God or "religion-specific language" have to be avoided. Part of the motivation comes from a 2015 Supreme Court of Canada case, *Mouvement Laïque Québécois vs. Saguenay*, but how much that explains is hard to tell.

INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS

Understandably, some church leaders have spoken against the new instruction. Catholic military

bishop Scott McCaig has called on the government to "go back to the drawing board." A few Catholic writers are up in arms, blaming bureaucratic idiocy, the vacuity of modern secularism, or even demonic forces of liberalism that oppose true religion. Thankfully, a younger writer also pointed out that the Carney government has a pretty strong record on religious freedom. To assume anti-religious intentions from his government does not sound plausible.

So where is this coming from? I spoke to a retired senior chaplain and he had no clear answer. He did, however, speak to the contradictions this instruction creates. Authenticity, to stand for your values, is essential to avoid moral injury in the military, and now a chaplain cannot be authentic as a person of faith. Rather than creating space

for everybody, the instruction excludes and enforces neutrality on everyone. Even if it will not stop chaplains from ministering to their people as true professionals, it does send a bad signal.

FLAW IN THE PRINCIPLE

As I read the instruction, I was reminded of that first encounter with a Canadian policy document long ago. It is (again) clear, thorough and thoughtful. I also believe it is wrong. It displays a flaw in secular liberalism that appears in many places. Moreover, I do not see the benefit of trying to articulate a general principle based on a case involving a lone atheist in Quebec, let alone enforcing that principle where it does not belong. It takes the agency away from professionals such as chaplains who are trained to be authentic and inclusive at the same time.

These are complicated matters and need to be handled carefully and respectfully. Catholic writers do well to hold their fire. More than anything else, the situation offers a learning opportunity that this country can benefit from tremendously. I am convinced chaplains will do their part. [✍](#)



A CAF soldier trains at Borden, Ontario.

Niamat Ullah, Unsplash

THE KINDNESS OF EXCLUSION



Sara Pot | thepotfamily@gmail.com

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

The two women on the GO train looked annoyed when I explained they were sitting in a wheelchair-designated space. They huffed and muttered but took the stairs to the upper level of the train car while I turned to latch Janneke's chair for the start of our trip.

LET'S GO TO THE EX!

In August, one of our respite nurses and I took Rachel and Janneke on the GO train to visit the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in Toronto. It's Canada's largest community fair, with midway rides, games, shows and amazing (albeit deep-fried) food.

Rachel and Janneke love riding the train, so the journey is part of the adventure.

There's one train car identified as the accessibility coach, and over the years, we've travelled with older adults who use walking assistance and other families who use wheelchairs like ours. There are times when my girls are the only individuals riding who need mobility support, and the seats are filled with those who might be travelling with luggage or young families with strollers and wagons.

On our way to the CNE that Thursday morning, the accessibility coach filled up quickly. Sub-

sequently, the Customer Service Ambassador made announcements at each station stop, reminding passengers that the coach was for those with mobility challenges. He went so far as to physically point out the other train cars and encourage boarding further along the train.

ALL WELCOME?

The theme of this month's issue is hospitality, and the experience of the accessible GO train car reminded me of a particular chap-

**The accessibility
coach filled up
quickly.**

ter of Priya Parker's *The Art of Gathering: How we meet and why it matters*. In her chapter "Close Doors," Parker highlights the kindness of exclusion, something I needed to read several times in order to fully understand. Parker writes, "The thoughtful gatherer



Waiting for the GO train.

Submitted

morning, many of us did gather on the accessibility coach with the intention of visiting the CNE. Had he not gently but firmly excluded individuals who do not have mobility challenges at each station stop, there would have been no room for a family of eight, which boarded at the halfway point with individuals using a manual wheelchair and a large power wheelchair. In that moment, I was thankful the two women I had asked to move were the only ones irritated with the nudge. For the second half of our trip, those of us in the accessibility coach worked to fit everyone safely, as if we were tasked with a giant puzzle. My respite nurse remarked on how amazing it was to meet strangers and feel instantly acquainted through a common goal.

The train ride moved me to wonder: if, at its core, hospitality is about creating a space where people feel welcome and safe, then sometimes intentionally closing the door actually helps create the necessary room. [✍](#)

COBALT STAIN IN CHARTRES



Katie Munnik | katiemunnik@yahoo.ca

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

I DIDN'T KNOW the train would be like that. Seats across a table like something from a movie. But I'd never been on a French train before. I was twenty-one, so everything felt surprising and it was springtime.

The winter had been more grey than I expected. I was a student on exchange for the year in

in the sunshine.

That day, I'd been to Chartres to see the cathedral's famous medieval stained glass. Legend says that the method for making this blue glass has been lost or even hidden. But this is only a legend. The recipe has been on European library shelves without interruption since the twelfth century. We can read

I wanted to keep that light near me, wrapped around me, always.

Edinburgh and I'd left my winter boots at home, expecting rain and mild temperatures. Only, my student apartment must have been built before insulation was invented because the cold penetrated it and I hadn't been warm in months. But now I was on a train

how the craftsmen added cobalt to the melting glass to create a deep saturation because the resulting colour was in – rather than on – the glass. Cobalt also strengthened the glass, making it more durable than the contemporary reds and greens.

Standing in the cathedral, I'd

been awed by the colours. The drench of that ubiquitous blue ignited the biblical figures clad in orange and amber robes. I was dazzled. I wanted to take some home. I wanted to keep that light near me, wrapped around me, always.

In a street near the cathedral, there was a small jewellery shop and I went in, hoping foolishly that they sold light. Instead I bought a silver pendant – a cross with amber at each tip. The silver's beautiful blue reflections and the amber's glow felt right. Of course, it was insufficient – a necklace is no cathedral – but it was a symbol of my feelings that day and on the train, my fingers kept finding the silver as I watched the wheat fields pass by.

"You are a believer?"

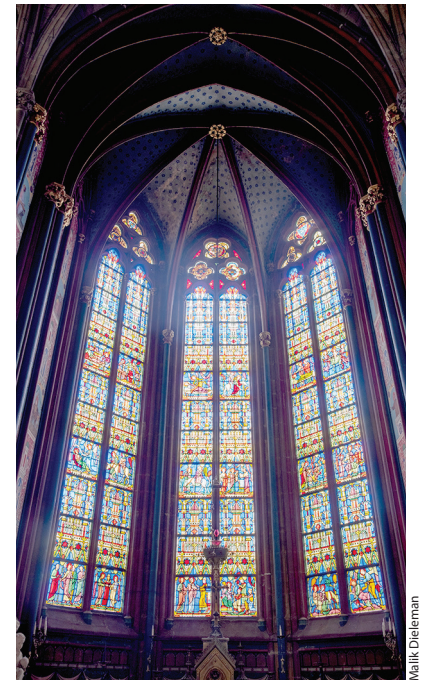
He surprised me. The man across the table had been sitting quietly, his wife reading a book. His voice was deep, with a rhythmic, West African cadence. Now, he smiled and pointed to my cross.

"Yes," I said. "I am." I told him about visiting the cathedral and tried to say something about the light, but I felt awkward.

His smile widened. "I under-



Submitted



Malik Dieleman

Stained glass in St. Leonard de Noblat in central France, 2024 (right) and Katie's necklace (left).

stand. I, too. We are far from home, believers. So, you are my sister. Welcome."

They were from Côte d'Ivoire and had loved the cathedral, too. It was so beautiful. But a different kind of church from what they knew, they said.

I understood. It was so different for me, too, so much older than I was used to and then that shock

of colour. And yet, I was loved by this ancient cathedral's continuing testimony to God's Spirit.

The same Spirit moved this man to call me sister and to give me welcome. This is the Spirit's hospitality, that – when we are open to it – will strengthen us from the inside, so that we might be lovingly connected across the table. ✨

NOUWEN: A SPIRITUAL FATHER



Arthur Boers | Guest Columnist

Arthur is CC's review editor. He had the honour of presiding at a graveside service marking the 30th anniversary of Nouwen's death on Sept. 21.

IN A PROMINENT place on my study wall hangs a copy of Andrei Rublev's 15th-century "Old Testament Trinity" icon, a gift from Henri Nouwen for my ordination. When Henri, a Dutch diocesan priest and prolific author, died unexpectedly of a heart attack at age 64 back in 1996, I lost a spiritual father.

In the late 1970s, I began reading Henri's books and articles, which became an important source of spiritual nourishment. I often brought them on retreats to read prayerfully. In 1981, I met Henri at Notre Dame where he gave a presentation on Vincent Van Gogh, one of his favourite subjects. We conversed in Dutch.

SPEAKING WITH HENRI

In 1988, I arranged to meet Henri for a couple of hours to in-

terview him for *The Other Side* magazine (an interview that went on to win an award and was often republished). The day quickly evolved into something more. I arrived early, in time to join him in his daily prayers. He encouraged me to stay the entire day at his Daybreak L'Arche community in Richmond Hill, Ontario, where mentally handicapped people and their assistants live together.

Henri sensed that I was going through a crisis and he was right. I felt he could see into my heart as he asked probing questions, counselled me, prayed with me, blessed me and invited me to stay in touch. He then gave me words that have shaped my life ever since: "You have a tender heart. Work is so

overwhelming, or counselling gets to you, because you are very tender. But this also means that God is calling you to a deep spiritual life. That's the other part of the story."

We stayed in touch and I visited a few times. Once, I went again as a journalist, this time writing for *Christianity Today*. Sensing that I was once more in crisis, he told me he was go-



Nykolaj Swamy, Wikimedia Commons, CC3.0

Henri Nouwen in 1993.

ing to "spoil" me so that I might know some healing. We had delightful meals, conversations and rich prayer. I was especially impressed that he remembered specific details of conversations from several years earlier. On another of my visits, he guided me on a five-day retreat.

ONE THING NECESSARY

Nouwen's many books remind me to stay centred and focused on God by prayer through Jesus Christ, as prayer is the "one thing necessary." His frank writing about his own fears, anguish, anxieties, busyness and struggles with darkness emboldened me to face my own broken places: the things that are hardest can be means (not obstacles) to God.

He taught me how to bless and be a blessing in ways that remind us that we are all icons of God. This has been one of my primary models for pastoring. Nouwen showed that the inner life is always a life lived for others; it will bear good works.

One autumn day he received a small group of my pastor

friends on our regular "day away." He listened to our questions and concerns and then told us: "Ministry is the least important thing. You cannot *not* minister if you are in communion with God and live in community. A lot of people are always concerned about: 'How

Henri sensed that I was going through a crisis and he was right.

can I help people?' 'How can I help the youth come to Christ?' 'How can I preach well?' But they are basically non-issues."

He continued: "If you are burning with the love of Jesus, don't worry. Everyone will know. They will say, 'I want to get close to this person who's so full of God.' But if you take a course on pastoral care and never pray, you become a professional. A minister is not someone who does a lot of things but someone who lives a life." ✨

FROM GRIEF TO COMMUNITY



Arlene Snyder | Guest Columnist

Arlene is a Christian writer, educator, mother, foster mom and grandmother. Her faith, life experiences and love of the outdoors inspire her stories and poetry as she embraces the possibilities of life's next chapter.



A singles group gathers at Arlene's farm.

HOW DO we turn our pain, our losses and disappointments around and allow God to reveal his greater purpose in them? We work hard, make our plans and try to put all the pieces together. We experience success and accomplishments, mixed with failures and disappointment and then, somewhere along the way, we learn that we are not in control at all. As Chuck Swindoll explains so beautifully, "The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude."

After the loss of my husband, I asked God to take my grief and turn it inside out. What could he do with the broken pieces? Slowly, God began to open my eyes to the needs of people around me. I had lived so long in the comfort and safety of married life, where many of my needs were lovingly cared for. I was not in a place to truly see or understand the loneliness, struggles and realities of life as a single person.

LIFE IN LOCKDOWN

My journey began the summer of 2021, a time when our world was locked down and we could no longer gather freely with fellow believers. I found myself longing for connection and community with others on a similar journey. I needed something life-giving again: a hike, a bike trip, a canoe adventure, an opportunity to bring people together so we would feel alive in such a desolate time.

My first adventure began when I connected on Facebook with a group of Christian singles who lived four hours from my home. They invited me to join them on a camping trip in Forest, Ontario, at Lakewood Christian Campground. Years earlier, after first committing

my life to the Lord, I had worked at this camp for a summer. It felt significant that God would call me

I found myself longing for connection and community with others on a similar journey.

back to that very place so many years later, during such a difficult season of life.

The friendships and encouragement I found at Lakewood inspired me to begin a Christian singles group closer to home. Our barn, which once was a youth hangout when my husband and I served together as youth leaders, became the perfect gathering place. Its openness met the requirements for hosting up to 50 people.

This was the beginning of an unexpected journey, building a Christ-centred community for Christian singles across southeastern Ontario. What began as grief, loneliness and uncertainty slowly became something filled with

connection, healing, friendship and renewed purpose.

SEASONS, TOGETHER

In the five years since then, we have built lasting friendships, shared many meaningful hiking adventures, canoe trips, camping weekends, square dances, a Pass-over meal, potlucks, game nights and evenings around campfires. But the biggest blessing for me was learning from others who had walked journeys I had never personally known or understood.

Through their stories, God began opening my eyes and softening my heart. These friends have become some of my greatest teachers. Through them, I discovered that loss can deepen compassion, suffering can produce wisdom, and the broken places can become places where God reveals greater meaning and purpose.

It's beautiful to see God bring pure joy through our trials just as James so clearly lays out (Jas.1:2-4). What once felt like the end of life became the beginning of a deeper understanding of God, of people and of the healing that can come when we walk through difficult seasons together. [✍️](#)

TELL ME A STORY

This column is written with children in mind. We hope you enjoy reading it aloud with the little people in your life!

WITHOUT GRUMBLING



Bob Bruinsma | bruinsmabob@gmail.com

Bob lives in Edmonton. His wife, Louisa, passed away in July, and now experiences God's hospitality eternally.

HAVE YOU ever been in a hospital? Well, you might say, "I think I was born in a hospital, but I don't remember that."

Or maybe you remember being in a hospital because you spent some time there when you were sick or had to get some treatment for a broken bone or something similar.

Though the word "hospital" is not found in the Bible, a related word, "hospitality," is found in a number of places. For example, Romans 12:13 tells us to "prac-

tice hospitality," and in 1 Peter 4:9 it says, "Offer hospitality to

When we think of Christian virtues, hospitality isn't the first thing that comes to mind.

one another without grumbling."

I have a big fat dictionary that tells me that hospitality is the "reception and entertainment of

guests, visitors or strangers, with liberality and good will." So, if you are hospitable, that means you provide a friendly welcome to people and treat them generously.

When we think of Christian virtues, we probably think of things like honesty, faithfulness, fairness, kindness and the like. Hospitality isn't the first thing that comes to mind. But a few months ago, I ended up in the hospital after having a serious car accident, and I can tell you that I was treated with a lot of hospitality. The nurses in the hospital were wonderful. The day after I was admitted to the hospital was my birthday, and they made a party hat for me and posted a huge card at the foot of my bed that said, HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BOB. I experienced a lot of hospitality in that hospital!

GOD'S EAGER KINDNESS

I find the 1 Peter 4:9 verse that I quoted above particularly interesting. Again, it says, "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." It's as if Peter is aware that



The birthday crown hospital staff made to celebrate Bob.

sometimes it's a bit of a pain to be hospitable. Imagine this: you are about to sit down for supper and the doorbell rings. It's that pesky neighbour who seems to show up at the most inconvenient times. "Oh, come on in," you say (a bit half-heartedly). "Won't you join us for supper?"

"I don't mind if I do, thank you," replies the neighbour and you grumble under your breath, "Rats, I wish she wasn't so eager to agree."

It's a good thing God isn't like that. When we come to God in prayer with our petitions and complaints (and even our praise), God never grumbles, "Oh boy,

here's Bob again. Doesn't he know that I'm busy trying to take care of a very difficult world? I wish he'd pick a more convenient time to chat." No, God is like a loving mother who stops what she's doing when her child bursts into the house with excitement to show her the shiny rock she just found. Or, to comfort her son when he's fallen off his bike and bruised his knee. God's hospitality knows no bounds. God is always ready to treat us with kindness and love. In fact, God's liberality and goodwill extended so far as to offer up his beloved son to die in our place. [✍️](#)

ENTERTAINING ANGELS?



Heidi VanderSlikke | hmvanderslikke@gmail.com

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

WE WERE celebrating a significant milestone for a special friend. Around the lunch table we swapped “quirky stories about Betty” – like mini-eulogies without the funeral. A picture emerged of a kind-hearted, fun-loving, doggedly determined Christian. The showstopper came when her daughters spoke about an incident from their childhood that left an indelible imprint on their hearts. With Betty’s permission, I’ll share the story with you.

Supper simmered on the stove late on a bone-chilling February afternoon. Suddenly, a knock sounded at the door. Betty opened it to see a small, scruffy man standing there. Numerous layers of clothing swallowed his slight frame. His pale face peered out

from under a toque soaked by the blowing snow. His bicycle stood in the driveway, expertly loaded with four bulging duffle bags.

“Good afternoon, ma’am,” he said. “I was wondering if you’d allow me to set up my gear in between a couple of snowbanks in your front yard. I need somewhere to spend the night.” (Betty’s kids had been gleefully tunnelling into those snowbanks all afternoon.)

“Well . . . no,” she said. “Why would you do that? You need to come inside and get warm.”

“Oh, no ma’am,” he replied. “I wouldn’t want to intrude.”

“If you sleep out there in the cold, I won’t get any sleep here in the warmth of my house. Come inside. I’ll make you a hot coffee.”



Louise Hansel, Unsplash

Her two pre-teen daughters peeked fearfully around the corner as the man peeled off multiple coats and outer-trousers, hanging them around the kitchen until he was down to a red flannel shirt and track pants. He stood over the heat register and introduced himself as Bill.

ROCKS AND A HOT BREAKFAST

The girls listened incredulously as their mother – the same one who had diligently lectured them on “stranger danger,” insisted that this man should spend the

night in their house. She tried to soothe them, reminding them that Jesus would have us help those in need. “But Mom,” they implored, “We don’t know him at all. And . . . he smells bad!” Their little brother continued playing in the corner, completely unconcerned by the drama. When their dad, Wim, came in for supper, he also had no problem at all with the situation.

So, Bill became their guest. He spent the evening with Betty and Wim in their living room. Derek slept peacefully in his room.

Heather and Heidi hunkered down safely with their Oma in the granny flat.

Betty was into painting rocks in those days. Bill asked if he might join in. He produced something with vibrant lights and some kind of demonic creature. “My version of ‘Starry Night,’” he said with a chuckle. Now Bill had opened a door. And Betty immediately invited Jesus into the conversation.

The next morning, after a hot breakfast, Bill declined the invitation to church. The family dropped him off at a country intersection and then he rode away down the wintry road, never to be heard from again.

To this day, her daughter’s eyes are wide as she says, “I still can’t believe you did that, Mom.”

Betty responds with her signature smile. “What else could I do?”

She confided to me later, “Sometimes I wonder if this was a case like that Bible verse about ‘entertaining angels unaware.’”

It wouldn’t surprise me, my friend. Not at all. [✍️](#)

A MESSY WELCOME



Amanda Talstra | Guest Columnist

Amanda is a joyful wanderer and humanitarian worker. She currently serves as Director of Justice & Peace for World Renew and lives in Terrace, B.C. with her husband and four children.

MY LAST MEMORY of Philippe* is of him rushing towards the communion table too soon. Before the pastor had recited the requisite story and familiar prayers and issued the invitation. The rest of us remained in our pews waiting for the signal that we were welcome – Philippe didn’t wait. The congregation sat in silence as our pastor lovingly coached him, in the awkwardness of it all. “Not yet, Philippe. Just wait a minute.”

The moment brings tears to my eyes even now. Philippe, so eager to accept his place at the table. He knew his invitation didn’t need to wait for human calling.

BANQUET TABLE

When our church invited the congregation to submit pieces of art based on Jesus’ parables, my seven-year-old daughter was eager, as

ever, to participate. She didn’t give it a second thought as she added her name to the list at the ministry fair, signing up for the banquet parable. We spent hours designing the scene and then cutting the felt pieces to create her vision. And the final piece was beautiful – exhibited so proudly in church and even in a magazine article. But I smile with a sigh when I see it, remembering that behind those colourful beggars and festive diners are lots of tears, a frustrated little girl (and her parents!) and a late-night hot glue slog fest to get everything together. Just like life, it was fraught and messy and painful, and yet the end result was more beautiful than we could have imagined.

When Philippe died, he left behind few of the markers of a conventional life. No children, no traditional obituary. But his funer-



The banquet table parable depicted in felt by Amanda’s daughter, Selah Talstra, and her hot glue assistant parents.

al was well attended, his battles in life honoured and his memories seared in my brain.

‘DO YOU LIKE HEINEKEN?’

My first memory of Philippe was in a fast-food parking lot in 2016.

He was asking me for money.

“I don’t mean to scare you, but just enough to buy a six-pack. Do you like Heineken?” he asked.

And then I started noticing him at church. Usually in the back. On the edges of conversations – we talked occasionally, but he never stayed long to chat. My family

moved away from Terrace for six years and when we returned to church, Philippe was still there. One Sunday, when I was sitting in the service by my wheelchair bound mother-in-law, he started shouting at us and had to be ushered out. I found out later he was upset because the bench by our library, dedicated to my late father-in-law, had been graffitied. Philippe was trying to show us his concern and support, only in the wrong tone and at the wrong time.

WIDE OPEN DOORS

Although we crossed paths, Philippe often seemed to forget who I was. There is much I never learned about Philippe and his past, but I will always be grateful for Philippe’s legacy to me – brought to life in his awkward church disruptions. The doors are flung open and the table overflows. It is a messy, broken yet beautiful banquet.

We don’t have to wait for a human invitation. Here we are, rushing to the table – where the welcome is always and ever wide. [✍️](#)

**Name changed for privacy.*

REDESIGNING CHURCH LEADERSHIP



Darren Roorda | roordadarren@gmail.com

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

RECENTLY, I SPOKE with another pastor turned church leadership coach and consultant. Her observation about today's pastors was strikingly simple: we expect them to do everything. She regularly coaches pastors struggling under the expectation that they become their church's expert-of-all-trades. Preacher, shepherd, counsellor, strategist, administrator, conflict manager, staff leader, theologian, community leader – and whatever else a week requires.

Canadian Christian leader Brian Stiller recently described even small churches as “intricate eco-systems,” with pastors expected to function as some combination of

shepherd, CEO, counsellor, teacher, strategist and even custodian.

Perhaps, then, the answer to “Where have all the pastors gone?” isn't simply making pastors tougher or more resilient. Perhaps we need to redesign the leadership environment in which we're asking them to serve.

IT'S OUR JOB FIRST

First, we can move from hiring a minister to becoming a ministering church.

This is a subtle but important difference. Churches shouldn't hire pastors to do the ministry. They should call pastors to lead and participate in the ministry God has en-

trusted to the whole body. As Paul reminds us, pastors and teachers are called to “equip his people for works of service” (Eph. 4:11-12). Pastors preach, teach, shepherd and lead – but elders, deacons and members also bring gifts God intends his church to use.

The healthiest leadership question isn't, “What is the pastor going to do about this?” but “Who has God already placed among us to help carry this ministry?”

DROP THE IDEALS

Second, perhaps we should stop searching for the ideal pastor and start calling the right pastor.

Read enough pastoral profiles and the problem becomes obvious. We want an exceptional preacher and compassionate shepherd; a visionary leader who is also an excellent administrator; someone who attracts young families, visits seniors, manages conflict, develops staff, disciples leaders and connects with the community.

Who wouldn't want that pastor? The problem is finding someone who possesses all those gifts.

What if churches became much



“Saint Bernardino Preaching from a Pulpit” by Francesco di Giorgio Martini (CC0, RawPixel) with Canva images.

more honest about the gifts they actually need – and then intentionally built leadership around the gifts their pastor doesn't possess? That isn't settling for less. It is understanding the body of Christ.

CHURCH HEALTH

Finally, we need to begin thinking beyond pastoral sustainability toward church health.

A church whose ministry, relationships and direction depend too heavily upon one person is fragile. Healthy churches develop leaders, identify gifts, share responsibility and build ministries capable of con-

tinuing through inevitable pastoral transitions.

The goal, therefore, isn't simply to prevent pastors from burning out. It is to build churches in which pastors – and congregations – can flourish together.

And that brings us back to where this three-part series began. Young Christians are still sensing God's call to ministry. Many simply aren't choosing the local church.

What if they encountered congregations that celebrated their particular gifts without expecting them to possess every gift? Where leadership was genuinely shared? Where healthy boundaries weren't interpreted as a lack of commitment? Where pastor and congregation understood that they were pursuing God's calling together?

Pastoral ministry would still be difficult. Shepherding God's people always has been. But it might once again look like a calling worth pursuing. Perhaps the question “Where have all the pastors gone?” isn't enough.

Maybe we also need to ask: “What kind of churches are we asking them to come back to?” [✈](#)

Your Future is Calling

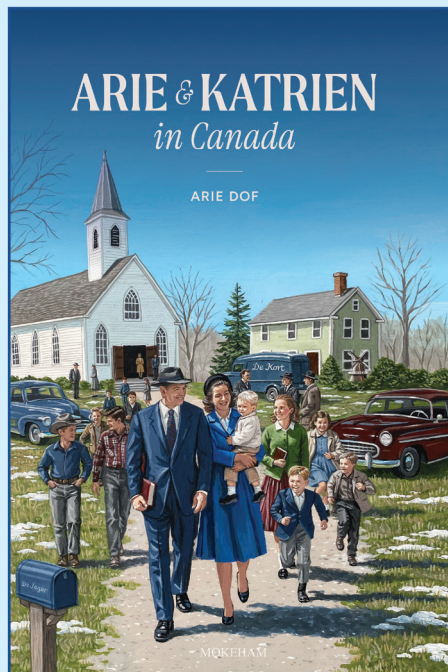
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De Jager's perceptive sketches were expertly translated by Rev. George van Popta, with affection and an insider's ear

Reading through these vignettes felt like paging through a family album, a chance to hear some of the stories I was never told.

Angela Reitsma Bick – Former Editor, *Christian Courier*

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ANNIVERSARY

The Christian Reformed Church of Stratford – 75th Anniversary. Join us in celebrating 75 years of God's Faithfulness. We will be holding an Open House on Saturday, November 21, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and a Catered Dinner and Program for current and former members at 5:30 pm. On Sunday, November 22, we will celebrate with a Special Church Service at 10:00 am, followed by cake, coffee and a soup luncheon. 190 Athlone Crescent. Stratford Ontario. For information, please contact Betty DeWeerd at office@stratfordcrc.org.



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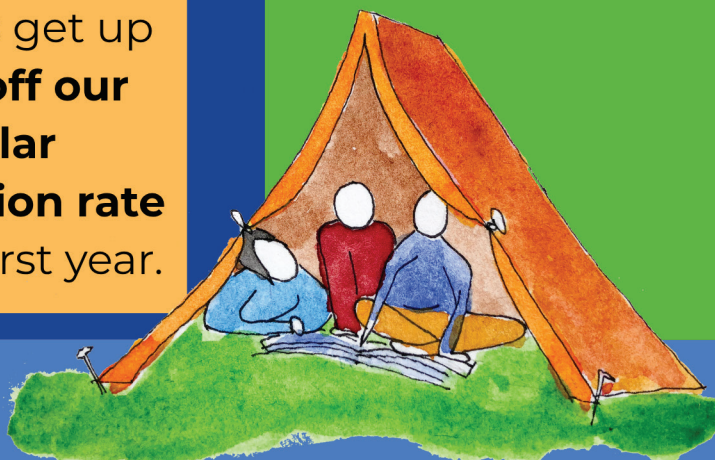
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GOD IN THE HURRICANES' LOCKER ROOM

Thunder Bay native Jordan Staal speaks to CC about faith, family and winning the Stanley Cup. | [James Dekker](#)



The Staal family after the Hurricanes' final game of the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

JORDAN STAAL NOT ONLY WON HIS SECOND STANLEY CUP in June, but he is also, at age 37, the oldest hockey player to win the Conn Smythe Trophy, which recognizes him as the most valuable player (MVP) of his team, the Carolina Hurricanes, in the playoffs. In a phone call in mid-July, Staal and I discussed his physical and spiritual journey over 30-some years of hockey, from his family's outdoor rink to the NHL.

A consummate player, Jordan is known around the league as a mature Christian team leader. I asked if he considered hockey a calling from God. "It's the passion I grew up with, just loving the game, taking one little step at a time," Staal replied. "But the NHL wasn't always my dream as a kid. It never solidified until it happened. It was more, 'What's my next play? What can I do today to make my game better?' It was always on my mind, never really my calling, but always what I wanted to do."

Jason Grootenboer, Staal's Thunder Bay Christian School teacher, recalled asking some 10-year-old boys, including Jordan, what they wanted to do after finishing school. Several said, "I want to play in the NHL." To which a young Jordan commented, "Well, that's highly unlikely to happen."

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But happen it did, with a growing sense of possibility that Jordan hadn't anticipated until his first Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2009. "It was amazing to lift the cup. A couple of days later, I woke up thinking, 'That's everything I wanted as a kid.' But I felt empty; something was still missing. That's when I finally figured, 'That hole's gotta be filled by God.' Maybe it was God's way of saying he'd been with me all the time, but I hadn't realized it. Only God's gonna fill my life and future." His parents' stated hope to raise Christian sons was bearing fruit.

JORDAN'S TWO FAMILIES

Family life has always defined the Staals, as Henry and Linda, Jordan's parents, described in an interview with *CC* (September 7, 2026). When Staal described the Hurricanes, it seemed as if the Hurricanes were nearly an extension of his biological family. That sense of family took years to sprout, but the seed was planted after the Penguins traded Jordan to Carolina in 2012. Eric, the oldest Staal brother, had already captained the Hurricanes for two years. Eric and Jordan played together for the Hurricanes for almost four years. With Eric's 2016 trade to the Rangers, Jordan graduated to co-captain, and later, in 2019, to captain. To add to the serendipity, the Hurricanes called up their youngest brother, Jared, from AHL's Charlotte Checkers; the three brothers started together on April 25, 2013.

Not surprisingly, Jordan speaks affectionately of the current Hurricanes team as family. After their 2006 Stanley Cup win, the Hurricanes missed the playoffs from 2009 till 2018. Since then, they've been in the playoffs every year, a remarkable turnaround culminating this year in a Stanley Cup victory.

HIGHS AND LOWS

Knowing that professional hock-

ey is extremely demanding, I probed, "How do you keep your faith growing in such pressure?" Staal's fulsome response: "Since I came to Raleigh, we've had a team chapel that meets every two weeks or whenever we can get together. Sid Graham, our chaplain in Carolina, has been an unbelievable leader for the fellows in the locker room. I invite him and ask everyone to come if they want. This year [Jacob] Slavin, [Logan] Stankoven, [Jackson] Blake, and Chatty [Jalen Chatfield] were the most consistent guys. Chatty recently accepted Christ and was baptized. Jacob was a big reason for that."

After a brief pause, Jordan added, "We've been doing couples Bible study with our neighbours in the last year." Clearly Jordan has woven spiritual values and commitment into his career, but his faith finds a home in the community, too.

"How does your pretty public testimony sit with teammates?" I asked. A thoughtful moment; then, "I make mistakes, but I'd like to think that they see something different in our leadership group. Love in the room is a big part of it. God's a big part of it. Bringing guys together, we become a family, treating everyone as you'd want to be treated. Roddy Brind'amour, Slavin, myself and the rest of the core guys try to build that family atmosphere. It's really bonding us together. God got us over the hump this year, for sure."

"The years we were really struggling were really hard. When I've suffered injuries, I'm looking up to God – like 'What's going on? Aren't you here?' But overall, I'd say God's been so consistent and faithful with me. I look back to my career and realize God's always been alongside me, without me recognizing it."

WINNING HUMBLY

This year's win was a long, agonizing time in coming, with Jordan a key player in the years of raising the team family. I asked him to describe that process. He emphatically responded, "You gotta have leadership and loyalty. Most of all, though, you have to be eager to be part of a family, to do life together game after game, year by year. Seven years, gradually building good teams. But



Jordan right after the Hurricanes won the Stanley Cup.

just coming up short. You never quite figure it out. We knew we had good teams through those years – but the frustrations, the step-by-step development. Then finally pulling it off in mid-June – it's all so cool."

As this was Jordan's second time lifting the Cup, I asked how it compared with the first. "When I looked at the cup then, it was childhood dreams come true – with all the minor hockey coaches, parents, my brothers. We were all part of that Penguins dream and team."

But this time: "It was my teammates, years of trying to figure this thing out and battling together, everything I saw them go through. Both Cup wins were very cool, just different."

We were both talked out and I was ready to hang up. I asked Jordan if he had anything else to add. He thought for a moment and then said with unintentional humility, "I really don't get what the big deal is about. I'm just a sod farmer from Thunder Bay." ➤



James Dekker

Though unlikely, Jim would love to go to a Hurricanes-Sabres game; it's much cheaper than Maple Leafs games and a shorter drive from his home in St. Catharines.