A Reformed Monthly | 81st Year of Publication | November 2, 2026 | No. 3191 | $6.00

CHRISTIAN COURIER

Christ-centred. Creative. Canadian.



Earl Grey Images, edited by Loretta Stadt

"I can do a lot of ministry and not be an ordained pastor," says former CRC minister Loretta Stadt. She left the denomination just seven years after going to seminary and being ordained.

WHERE HAVE CRC WOMEN PASTORS GONE?

In the past two years, nearly half of the women ordained as ministers of the word in the CRC have retired or left the denomination. | **Cheryl Mahaffy**

FAMILY, BELONGING, HOME. That's what church meant to Amanda Bakale growing up in a Baptist congregation, and then for decades within the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). But now, Bakale says the CRC no longer feels like home.

Like a growing number of female pastors, Bakale asked for "honourable release" from ordination in the CRC, citing recent synodical decisions, including approval of a Human Sexuality Report (HSR) constraining who belongs and what they may believe. "In a denomination that says both 'yes' and 'no' to women in ministry, we women have known what it's like to bear disagreement in our bones," Bakale said. "But I found myself out of line with the CRC, and there was no space for disagreement, no space to breathe. I thought we as leaders really need to show what it's like to lead when it costs you something."

Sitting at the rear of the classis meeting last year as her name was spoken and her ordination in the CRC ended, Bakale mourned the cost of leaving. Her sobs echoed in the otherwise silent room, heard but not acknowledged. To her, it seemed no one cared. "That's heartbreaking when you have belonged to a people," she reflected. "Not just

Continued on page 2

COMMON GROUND IN A WARMING WORLD

A Rocha Canada and Creation Ministries represent Christians who hold opposing views on the causes and severity of climate change. | **Abby Ciona**

THE SUMMER OF 2026 brought Canadians heatwaves, severe storms and wildfire smoke that made Toronto's air quality some of the worst in the world. Many scientists say climate change is to blame. But Canadians disagree on the correlation between human activity and our changing climate. A 2025 study by Angus Reid found that only 63 percent of Canadians believe that climate change is human-caused, down from 71 percent in 2021.

Some Canadians even claim that elevated temperatures could be beneficial for Canada's agriculture or save lives, since more people die from cold than from heat. Samuel Chiu says this perspective doesn't take into account the devastation of environmental disasters impacting the majority world: "It's only us in North American settings or more affluent societies that do not see the changing climate."

Chiu works for A Rocha, a Christian conservation organization that operates in 23 countries, including Canada. He is also the Lead of Engagement at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for A Rocha International and part of the Christian Climate Observers Program. He has been to eight UN Climate Change Conferences since 2015. "Many of our mission agencies . . . are tackling this issue on the ground," he told *CC*, "but they cannot talk about this in the home church because it makes no sense to the supporting North American church."

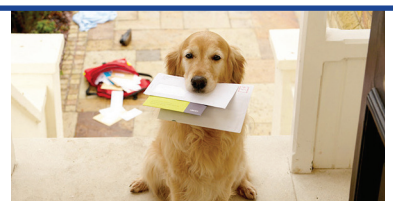
Continued on page 3



"Creation Care" by Malik Dieleman.

MAIL TO:

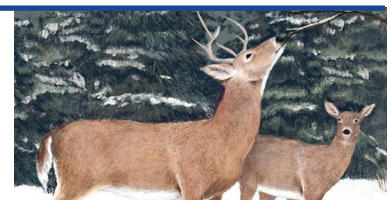
PM# 40009999 R9375



4 Mom, I miss you



6 Muslim-Christian dialogue



10 All Creation Waits

EXODUS CONTINUED

believed some stuff and thought some stuff. Belonged to a people and a story."

A LOPSIDED EXODUS

Concerned for other women exiting the CRC, but also for those remaining and for the entire denomination, Bakale wanted to know how many have left. Scouring CRC yearbooks, the denominational magazine and other sources, she found that the number of ordained ministers of the word who are women rose to a peak of 134 in 2023 and 2024 more than 25 years after ordination was opened to women in 1995, and then dropped to just 76 in the last two years. Nearly half (46 percent) of the CRC's female pastors are gone, including denominational leaders and seminary professors – some retired, but many looking to serve elsewhere.

Men are also leaving CRC ministry, but at far lower rates. In 2024, the CRC had 1,913 ordained men, 14 men for every woman. Among the 148 active CRC pastors since released from ordination, 91 (61.5 percent) are men and 57 (38.5 percent) are women. Counting retired as well as active ministers, 208 pastors have been released: 72 percent men, 28 percent women.

"The exodus of women should set off alarm bells within the denomination," Bakale said. "Even if you feel it's better this way, there should be acknowledgement of this suffering, and lament and loss."

DIMINISHING LEADERSHIP

Ordained in 1998, just two years after the CRC began allowing ordination of women, Amanda Benckhuysen is one of the women whose departure is shrinking the denomination's leadership pool.

Benckhuysen often attended synod as an advisor while a professor at Calvin Seminary (which she terms "a very difficult and lonely place to be as a woman") and later while leading a denominational Safe Church initiative (where she saw energy shift from being a safe space to being doctrinally pure). She said denominational leaders increasingly wielded power as if the end justified the means, using (and allowing) tactics such as bullying, marginalization and untruths. "I didn't feel like I could live out my calling in that space anymore," she said. "I left my job, a huge financial sacrifice for our family. But ministering with integrity is way more important to me."

Since then, she has begun teaching at Calvin University (not seminary) and pastoring a small United Church of Christ that has welcomed her unconditionally. "I'm excited about being in spaces where I don't have to defend my gender before I do ministry," she said.

Noting that her husband Martin remains a CRC pastor, Benckhuysen said she wishes the denomination well. "I continue to pray that the leaders who have crossed boundaries live out their faith with integrity. If you truly believe it is of God, then you don't need to abuse your power to make it happen."



Canva images and newspaper clipping from *Christian Courier*, April 2, 1993. Edited by Meghan Kort.

After decades of debate, the CRC officially permitted the ordination of women in 1995.

AT HOME IN THE CRC

Brittney Salverda stands among the shrinking number of women who remain ordained in the CRC. She applauds synod's approval of the HSR. "If we hadn't solidified this position, which I think is Biblical – challenging at times but good and true and beautiful as well – this might not be a place for me," said Salverda.

Salverda and her husband David co-pastor a small CRC in Alliston, Ontario, where it's said Brittney is "the feistier one" in the pulpit. Her stance on the HSR surprises some who link beliefs about God-ordained gender roles with opposition to women in church leadership. "I think the Bible allows and calls for women to preach and prophesy and have leadership positions if the Spirit allows them to do so, but I also think marriage should be between a man and a woman."

Salverda recently launched a counselling practice, as part of the couple's vision to earn some income outside the church. "We do feel called to small churches," she said. "We don't want to have this call attached to our financial security."



Amanda Benckhuysen.



Amanda Bakale.

Salverda foresees that adopting the HSR may lead the CRC to revisit whether women should be ordained. "I don't find myself worried about the future in that regard," she explained. "My ordination is a gift, but I hold the gift loosely. I have ministry work to do today."

Given her local focus, Salverda said, "My female colleagues leaving has not had that much impact on me. But it has been really hard and sad for some who have stayed. I know they're out there. I want to find them."

As the network of female pastors shrinks, Bakale said, it becomes harder for those remaining to find and support each other. Women she has mentored are lonelier and lament lost colleagues. Whether women remain ordained in the CRC because their beliefs align with the denomination, because their role matches their calling, because they cannot afford to leave, because they're near retirement or for other reasons, is hard to say. Still, some feel judged for their decision. Several pastors declined to be interviewed for this article.

REDEFINING THE COVENANT

"I believe the CRC is squandering its opportunity to have a prophetic voice," said Michelle Kool, who pastored Covenant CRC in Edmonton until it voted to remain in the denomination. Kool now pastors Gardens Community Church, a St. Albert, Alberta congregation that recently left the CRC. "This denomination was known for being a biblical and learned group that intentionally and consciously wrestled with hard issues together. Now we've come to a very significant difficulty, and suddenly those we've considered brothers and sisters are outside the covenant."

As a woman in CRC spaces, Kool said her voice was tolerated but not always heard. "There was no standard of behaviour at those tables that would make it safe for everyone to be there. I could see that, moving forward, marginalization would happen of many who didn't agree with a specific agenda."

Seeking to stay within the reformed tradition but knowing that the RCA in western Canada does not ordain women in ministry, Kool moved her credentials to RCA Classis Schenectady, New York, a sanctuary for many displaced pastors. In the future, she hopes opportunities will open to bring her ordination back to Canada, perhaps through the Toward Canada network.

Leaving the CRC had repercussions beyond her imagining, Kool said. "It meant giving up my community, my church family, my colleagues, my livelihood." Her husband was also without work at the time, adding to the financial angst. One couple who had gone through a similar leave-taking walked alongside the Kools, soaking up their pain. "That was key for us to stay faithful – our most authentic church at the time."

MINISTRY ON THE MARGINS

Loretta Stadt grew up in a family on the margins, with siblings challenged by schizophrenia and a father who felt free to stand up mid-sermon, rebuke the minister and herd his household out of church, setting his children up for bullying at school. "I know a bit about what it feels like to be on the outside," Stadt said. That's why, after decades of raising children, volunteering and later-in-life seminary training, Stadt began serving Avenue CRC, which collaborates with other faith-based ministries to be a presence in a complex Edmonton neighbourhood. A cou-



Brittney Salverda.

ple of years ago she urged its tiny congregation, still reeling from covid and the loss of a charismatic leader, not to ignore synodical decisions but instead to wrestle with whether remaining in the CRC would allow them to continue embracing everyone on the margins, even as the process led to her own burnout.

At the same classis meeting where Avenue Church disaffiliated from the CRC, Stadt left as well, feeling bruised and betrayed. "The human sexuality decision was a huge factor," she said. "But the biggest factor was unwillingness to allow any diversity, any space for conversation, any space for people to work through things. None."

In the audience at that classis meeting was a transgender youth who had grown up in Avenue Church, Stadt recalled. "It meant a lot to him that I didn't just say, 'I want to walk with you. I see you for who you are.' That I actually gave something up to do it."

Less than seven years after being ordained, Stadt has retired from the pastorate. "Ministry is my whole life. It's in my blood. But I can do a lot of ministry and not be an ordained pastor," she said. "It's never been about the organization. It's always been, 'What does God want me to do?'"

Withdrawing from ordination in the CRC was not about being a woman, Stadt reflects. "I made a conscious decision long ago not to dwell on being a woman in the CRC; I've seen other women become resentful and bitter. But the reality is, finding a place to serve as a woman was difficult. I wouldn't want to stay as a woman the way it is now."



Cheryl Mahaffy

Cheryl is an Edmonton-based freelance writer who worships at Fellowship Community Church.

CLIMATE CONTINUED

To better understand how climate change conversations are happening in churches here, *CC* interviewed three Canadian Christians who hold different positions on the issue.

WILL OUR PLANET DIE?

CC spoke with representatives from Creation Ministries International (CMI), a creation apologetics organization. Richard Fangrad, CEO of CMI-Canada, points to the distant past for climate hope. He says the age of the dinosaurs was filled with abundant life in an atmosphere believed by both creationists and evolutionists to be richer in CO2 than our current atmosphere.

Fangrad says people shouldn't be so anxious about a changing climate and mainstream media should be publishing historical climate data showing that life can survive at higher temperatures. "It's not misinformation, it's just that there's priority given to some studies that favour the particular worldview of the day," said Fangrad, "the data that does not support that worldview is less prominent."

Fangard says he's concerned about how climate anxiety is impacting families: "There are some parents that are saying, 'we don't want to have kids because the earth is going to fry and it's going to be very difficult and the economies are going to go down because of climate change.'"

"Looking at it biblically, we understand climate has always changed somewhat," Thomas Bailey, also from CMI-Canada, told *CC*. "There was a global flood, and there was an ice age. That's some pretty severe climate, but it hasn't been that severe since. It's not supposed to be. It's supposed to be relatively stable." Bailey doesn't believe our planet will die.

SIGNS OF CERTAINTY

Chiu, from A Rocha Canada, agrees with Fangrad and Bailey that "climate has always been changing." But he believes it is changing in a way now that is different from how it changed in the past. In the past, he says, climate changed over thousands or millions of years. But in the last 150 years, we're seeing something more extreme. He calls it "climate mutation."

Chiu points to the thousands of scientists around the world dedicated to studying climate science as part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the fact that over 90 percent of those scientists agree that the climate change happening is caused by human activities.



Richard Fangrad.



Thomas Bailey.

SMALL WAYS TO CARE FOR CREATION

1. Participate in recycling and compost programs.
2. Use reusable bags and containers.
3. Plant native plants in your garden.
4. Consider buying secondhand instead of new.
5. Clean up garbage in your neighbourhood.
6. Shop for local produce when possible.
7. Learn more about your local nature.
8. Take part in a citizen science program.



Samuel Chiu.

"In science, you never have that kind of certainty," says Chiu. "If you have a drug that will be able to have some kind of 60 percent effectiveness, that will be considered high. But we're talking about over 90 percent of certainty right now on climate. I just want to put it into that kind of perspective. So there's no doubt about it."

A HUGE OPPORTUNITY

Chiu notes that churches on both sides of the debate have a huge opportunity to see caring for the environment as joining with God in the restoration of the old creation. "There is always some common ground," he says.

Chiu gives two recommendations for Christians looking to practice this distinctly Christian environmentalism referred to as "creation care." First, to understand our purpose in God's story, from old creation to new creation. "When we preach the gospel, what kind of gospel are we talking about? Are we just talking about individual souls being saved and destined to heaven? Or are we talking about the King Jesus declaring his lordship on all things and the well-being of everybody far and close, including creation?"

The second is to know our place. "We are in Canada, for example, and we are being blessed in Canada. Who are we as a people to be able to express God's purpose, in this world, in this time?"

Chiu believes that being able to name the things around us, like rivers, plants and geological features, is the first step to being able to understand and care for them. "How could we help restore them to the way that they were created to be?"

Christians should be at the "forefront" of creation care, agreed Bailey. "It's not just about saving people. God is restoring the entire earth. There's going to be a new heavens and new earth. And we get to be a part of that renewing."

Fangrad, Bailey and Chiu all pointed to a way to care for the environment that rejects the catastrophic thinking that dominates the media and instead embraces hope, faithful stewardship and trust in an unchanging God.

"A lot of the concern about climate change stems from the notion that we're the problem and therefore we're the only ones that can fix anything," says Bailey. "In a biblical worldview, God is ultimately in control."

Fangrad points to Noah's flood as an example of God's faithfulness to creation after "the biggest climate catastrophe ever." Bailey notes that's not an excuse to be wasteful or to turn the whole earth into a wildlife sanctuary, but to be responsible as stewards of the world.

"We have a line that we use in our ministry for a number of things," Bailey concluded. "Anything we can do to reverse the effects of the curse and the fall of man, everything that fell apart or started falling apart, death, disease . . . Anything we can do to reverse those effects is a good thing. Even the littlest."



Abby Ciona

Abby is a photographer, author and Redeemer University alumna. You can subscribe to her blog at abbyciona.substack.com.

UNDERGRAD INBOX



Angela Reitsma Bick

Angela, former Editor of Christian Courier, *is speaking in Vancouver on November 7 at the Reflector Project conference, teaching a new ICS course called "Broken Hallelujah" and doing some freelance writing and editing on the side. The following guest editorial is a fictionalized account of real conversations with her daughter Alba this autumn.*

Hey Mom,
Missing you. ~ A.

Hi kiddo,
How did you sleep? How was your first day of classes? We miss you too. Quinn is guarding the front door like it's her full-time job to wait there for your return. Love Mom

Classes were OK. Campus is so big it's taking me a while to figure out where to go. I'm stuck on this medical form asking for every vaccination I've ever gotten. What year was measles? Give Quinn a treat for me! ~ A.

That's one of the vaccines you get as a baby and then just before kindergarten, I think. You would've been four. Can't wait to hear more about your profs and the people in your program. Remember that time you were talking with someone in the States, and when he heard you were studying human rights, he said, "You keep that up there! We try not to do that down here."

Thank the Lord that you also met an old friend of your grandparents at church the next day, who heard about your upcoming studies and said, "We could really use more of that around here." To which I say – about both countries – "Amen." ~ Mom

Well, week one is over. It was fantastic and terrible at the same time. I'm glad it's done. I just want to come home and make cookie dough. ~ A.

You did it! You made it through. It won't always feel like this, I promise. Think of all the stuff you've navigated already! Will put some cookie dough in the mail immediately. ~ Mom

Our shower leaks, I haven't had time to do laundry, and I think I'm getting a cold. Plus I forgot my white jersey at home. Can I call you tonight? ~ A.

Of course! Call anytime. I'll just be here cleaning the office, doing taxes and lamenting the cost of gas. Classic adult stuff.

Quinn has not left her post. ~ Mom

Mom, I have a semi-urgent grammar problem. Help! ~ A.

That's my favourite kind of problem. What's up? ~ Mom

Who wrote the *Doctrine of Discovery*? I can't have a footnote without an author. ~ A.

Well, that would've been the Pope. I just looked it up – it was Pope Alexander VI. In 1493. Wow, he didn't waste much time after "Columbus sailed the ocean blue," eh? Is this for your Indigenous studies class? Feels really relevant for Orange Shirt Day, too. Love from Mom

Yeah, it was for my Indigenous studies class, which, interestingly enough, started with Caribbean Indigenous history. Lots of orange on campus today. In my Human Rights class today, we went around the class and everyone said their reasons for getting into human rights – the list seemed endless! Women's rights, children's rights, the right to education, refugees' rights, the right to clean drinking water, the right to not be trafficked, trans rights, climate rights, freedom of speech and more – that was really cool. Such a difference from being in spaces – even Christian ones – where people don't seem to care. Or the ones who think that in Canada, we've "solved" human rights and it's all good.

On the homework front, however, things are grim: I'm supposed to read 280 pages this week. Indubitably, it's true that in attempting to be efficacious, academic writers use a multiplicity of words which in mine own humble opinion, makes things unquestionably worse. ~ A.

Did you see the news about the woman who just won a Nobel Peace Prize? It's in your field! Navi Pillay, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the first non-white female judge in a high court in South Africa, and a judge in the ICC in the Hague. The current UN Secretary said that she's shown how "defending human rights is the surest safeguard against injustice." Amazing.

Next time someone questions what you're studying, just show them Pillay's resume. Love Mom

Hi Mom, What an inspiration! We looked at her extensive resume in class today. Did I tell you about my co-worker last summer, who was pretty confused when he heard I was going to study human rights? "What can you even do with that?" he said. "What does it accomplish? There's no way that's a career." ~ A.

Ah, the accomplishment metric. Our culture's siren song. What did you tell him? ~ Mom

Haven't thought about that conversation in a while. I told him that I'm not doing it because I think it will be easy or the number one way to make money. Just that I don't think I could live with myself if I didn't.

Yes, it will be hard. But if I don't follow the pull I have to seek justice, that would be way harder. ~ A.

Kiddo – that is a holy calling right there. A beautiful way to live out your faith. Could not love you more. ~ Mom

I've been thinking about how the world is not irredeemable, right? If it was, why would God care? If we were absolutely doomed, we'd be doomed. But we're not. I choose hope. Not because of what I see but because I believe things could be better. ~ A.

Dear kiddo, That is beautiful. You're writing your own pep talk and there's nothing more I can add! "We can't fix this whole broken world," as Lore Wilbert says, "but we can take the pieces and make something new."

You are gathering the pieces. You are figuring out something new.

See you in FOUR DAYS! Quinn is going to wag her whole body in happiness when you walk through that door. Love Mom
P.S. Bring your laundry!

CHRISTIANCOURIER

Founded in 1945

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

EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF
Co-Editors: Meghan Kort
meghan@christiancourier.ca
Maaike VanderMeer
maaike@christiancourier.ca
Features Editor: Marlene Bergsma
features@christiancourier.ca
Reviews Editor: Arthur Boers
reviews@christiancourier.ca
Contributing Editors: Michael Buma
mike@christiancourier.ca
Angela Reitsma Bick
angela@christiancourier.ca
Circulation, Ads & Admin:
Michelle Slomp
subs@christiancourier.ca
Bookkeeping: Heather Snippe
heather@christiancourier.ca
Art & Poetry: Maaike VanderMeer
maaike@christiancourier.ca
Digital Editor: Jennifer Boone
jenna@christiancourier.ca
Photo Editor: Malik Dieleman
malik@christiancourier.ca
Layout and design: Kevin Tamming
kevin.christiancourier@gmail.com
Layout and Ad design: Naomi Francois
naomi@collidemedia.ca

Christian Courier is published by the Board of **Reformed Faith Witness**: James Dekker (Chair), John Bakker, Shiao Chong, Sylvan Gerritsma, Jaime Spyksma, Noah Van Brenk and Helen Vreugdehil.

The publication of comments, opinions or advertising does not imply agreement or endorsement by *Christian Courier* or the publisher.

The paper is published on the first Monday of each month.

CANADA MAIL
Publications Mail Agreement
No. 40009999

Return undeliverable addresses to:
Christian Courier
PO Box 124
Wainfleet ON L0S 1V0

(ISSN 1192-3415)

SUBSCRIPTIONS:
To subscribe,
email subs@christiancourier.ca
or call 1-800-275-9185.

One year (12 issues): $70.
Six months (6 issues): $35.
Two years (24 issues): $130.

Please contact circulation if you cannot afford the subscription price but would like to receive *Christian Courier*.

CHRISTIAN COURIER
PO Box 124
Wainfleet ON L0S 1V0
1-800-275-9185
christiancourier.ca

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of

Canada

Printed in Canada

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN BUILDING?

To go along with our year-end campaign, we've asked you to send us your building stories. You can find more stories on pages 7 and 24.



Judy Van Huizen

John and Judy's 11-year renovation project is almost complete.

LOVE IN A CONSTRUCTION ZONE

In 2013, John and I bought a house built in 1869. We moved in 2015 and began restoration. John had worked in construction to put himself through university, so he had a good idea of how to proceed. And I have always loved creating: everything from embroidery to quilting, as well as furniture refinishing, painting and gardening. This house needed some major updating – it would take plumbing, electrical, insulation and flooring to start. It had been converted into a duplex around 1920 and had been in the same family for three generations. We wanted to restore the house while respecting the neo-Gothic architecture.

Renovations take time, money and a certain kind of determination when living in a construction zone. "Slowly but surely" was a standard response to friends' and family's inquiries.

After 11 years, we are almost finished. It has been a labour of love. Finding some relics, broken tools and old newspapers reminded us of how much life has changed in 150 years and gave us an appreciation for modern conveniences but also for a long-ago, slower, less wasteful life.

We and our children, their spouses and our grandchildren are making memories here. There is great satisfaction in restoration work. We see it as part of our image-bearing of the God who redeems and restores what is broken in creation and humanity.

Judy Van Huizen
Trenton, Ont.

WHERE DO I START?

Over the last 60 years, I have built so many things that it is impossible to list them all. When Evelyn and I married and moved into our apartment, we wanted to separate the kitchen area from the living room area. So I built a 100" wide by 16" deep and 70" tall storage/bookshelf unit in our university research lab's workshop. It had to be modular because I needed to transport it in my wife's Corvair. She used burlap behind the bookshelves, and that burlap made a great foundation for our Christmas cards.

Other projects include two kayaks; the plans came from the U.K., and I had to get special Sitka spruce that was knot-free and bend thin slats of ash into semicircles. I built a 4' by 8' tree house complete with a firepole, two modular playhouses that could be disassembled and moved, and a wooden Rolls-Royce-type car body that would fit on a sled. I've also built various pieces of stereo equipment from kits, including tuners, preamplifiers, power amplifiers and even a colour TV set!

Tjalle Vandergraaf
Pinawa, Man.



Henrietta Hunse

Henrietta's front yard labyrinth.

LAWN LABYRINTH

On the one hand, my front lawn was in sad shape. On the other hand, I had been introduced to labyrinths during a retreat and found it to be a meaningful experience. I began to play with the possibility of transforming my front yard into a labyrinth. It required modifications to accommodate the two trees and flower bed already there. And there was not enough space to make a full-size labyrinth. But I started sketching a simple four-circuit Cretan design, and stretching the loops around the trees and flowers. I decided to outline the path using bricks. So I set to work, building it brick by brick and, to the astonishment of my neighbours, little by little it became a reality. That was in the summer of 2005.

The labyrinth is still the distinctive part of our front yard. To be honest, I rarely walk it for the purpose of meditation, but it is great for community building. Passersby inevitably initiate a conversation, and neighbourhood kids regularly come by for their run around the "track." I look back with pride on this building project, which turned out so well; it continues to bring me pleasure and meaning.

Henrietta Hunse
Saint Catharines, Ont.



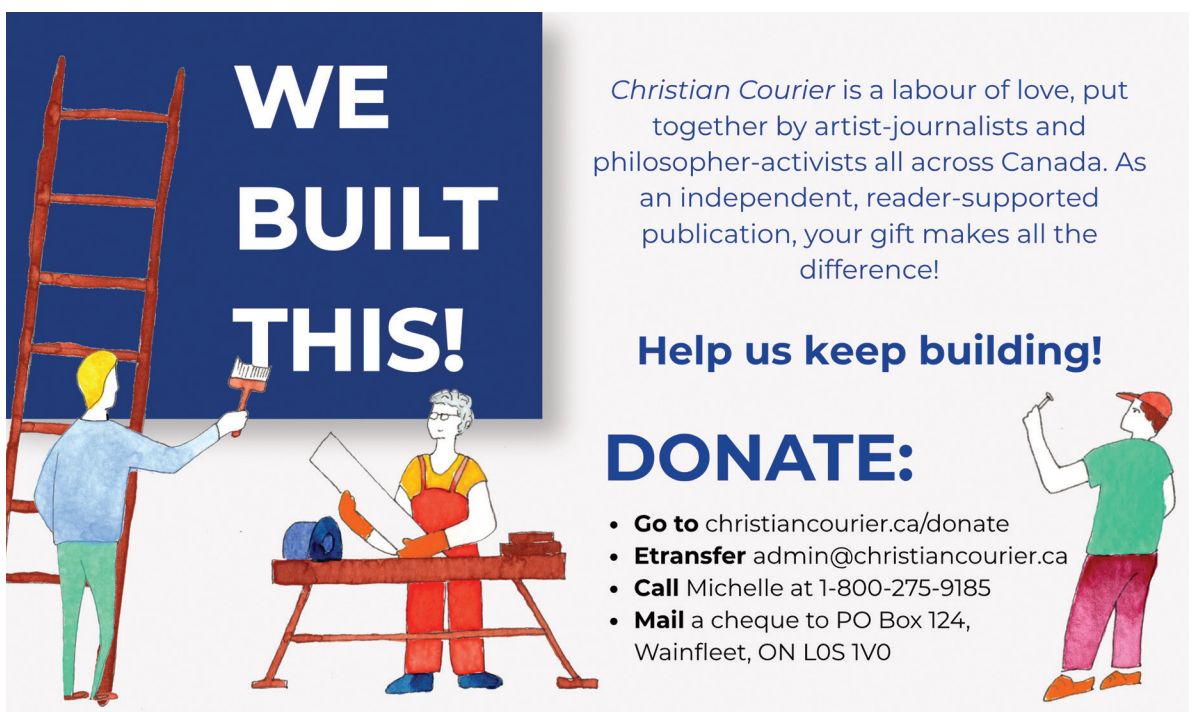
Dean Bosma

Dean's reclaimed ski chair.

RETIRED SKIS GET NEW LIFE

We passed by some discarded downhill skis on the side of the road some years ago, and decided to give them a new life. Marlene had been complaining that her wooden Muskoka chair on our dock would float away during the spring floods, so we intended this chair for the dock. I built it, using a modified Lee Valley Tools Muskoka chair plan, with pressure-treated lumber, stainless steel screws and exterior stain, to withstand the outdoor weather. The used skis make it super heavy – no way it would float away! However, it turned out so well that it spends much of its time indoors, and doesn't venture any farther outside than the front porch. I have some more skis in the basement, and have plans for a matching footstool . . .

Dean Bonsma
Wellandport, Ont.



YOUNG, DIVERSE AND READY TO TALK

Toronto's Turkish community leads the way in interfaith dialogue. | **Matthijs Kronemeijer**



IDI GTA

The Intercultural Dialogue Institute aims to bring unity amidst diversity.

AT 192 SPADINA AVENUE IN DOWNTOWN TORONTO, close to Lake Ontario, stands an industrial heritage building that houses the Centre for Social Innovation. The centre provides hospitable co-working and office space to a variety of creative nonprofits. One of those is the Intercultural Dialogue Institute for the Greater Toronto Area (IDI GTA). A few artisanal objects in showcases – ceramic tiles, metalwork – suggest a connection to the eastern Mediterranean, but otherwise there is nothing too distinctive about the office. It blends in.

At the core of IDI is dialogue, says Serena*, a second-year astrophysics student at the University of Toronto. "It changes how I talk to people; I learn to express myself better. Being involved in IDI has helped me move from the faith my parents taught me to a deeper, more informed understanding of my faith."

Serena grew up in Turkey, but moved to Canada after high school. Now she is one of many engaged volunteers who put the IDI idea into practice. The youth group she is part of is mostly self-directed and self-motivated in terms of the activities they want to do. Her group meets weekly; "girls chilling out" as she puts it, but they also read religious texts and dream up activities.

Tyler, a student of sociology and political science who plans to go to law school, values IDI mostly as a third place away from home and school. "People around my age are increasingly looking for a place to hang out, connect with their peers and talk about things," he says. "That is the main reason I joined. Coming together with people around my age, as well as being with my own friends, making them connect and just building relationships."



IDI GTA

A community and friendship dinner hosted by IDI GTA during Ramadan. Several Toronto organizations, including churches and synagogues, collaborate with IDI to put on these community-building events every year.



Volunteers at the IDI Jars of Hope event on Oct. 8 packaged 1,000 jars of soup mix for distribution to food banks and shelters across Toronto.

"We are specifically trying to get the youth organized by themselves," says Fatih, IDI's executive director. He himself came to Canada in 2017. "New generations have a different approach to the work than we do." His role is mostly to offer practical guidance and mentorship as needed. This past summer, IDI Youth partnered with Kairos Canada and Camp Micah to run a camp for 15 to 30-year-olds called Model Youth Justice.



Malik Dieleman

Fatih, IDI GTA's executive director.

ABRAHAMIC DIALOGUE

The core of IDI is built by the Turkish immigrant community of the GTA, and Serena is one of them. She is a committed Muslim, and so is Leyla*, a nurse. Both have attended IDI *iftar* meals, the festive meal at the end of the day during Ramadan. IDI has partnered with Toronto churches and synagogues to host *iftar* meals since 2005 (with a break over covid). Leyla and Serena found it especially meaningful to be in a Jewish synagogue and hear the *ezan*, the Islamic call to prayer, marking sundown and the end of the fast. Serena says that during Ramadan she makes a special effort to hear the *ezan*, which includes the confession that God is greatest. "As Muslims, our lives begin and end with the *ezan*. The father whispers the *ezan* into a child's ear as they are born, and my father did so to me. And when we die, and are buried, they pray the *ezan* as well."

Leyla says Hizmet's interfaith work helped her in the early years of her marriage. Her husband is a Filipino Catholic and they found faith-related questions really difficult to handle. That changed, however, after they attended an interfaith event where a Catholic priest spoke very positively about the Prophet Muhammad and how he put an end to idolatry and other sins the Arab tribes of his time were committing. The priest explained that for this to happen, Muhammad had to be a person with help from above, someone chosen by God.

"It was a wild moment for me

THE HIZMET CONTROVERSY

The Intercultural Dialogue Institute branches in Canada are part of the Hizmet community, which means "service" in Turkish. It is an action-oriented community that was inspired by the Islamic preacher and organizer Fethullah Gülen, who taught that it is possible to live as Muslims in modern society and to embrace the benefits of science and technology. The community believes the Quran can be reinterpreted to speak to the modern era.

According to Leyla, Fethullah Gülen made it very clear that the goal of interfaith relations is not to make people convert. "The only goal for dialogue is to show people how we live, what we do, what we believe, and to learn what they believe, how they live, what they do. You cannot hate and you cannot be scared by what you know."

In 2013, the Turkish government labelled the Hizmet movement as terrorist, a claim no Western country has accepted thus far. Almost every family in the IDI community has suffered from the government's crackdown. Serena's parents were stripped of their teaching licenses and her dad was imprisoned for several years when she was a child. Now that the family lives in Canada, she is happy to use her freedom to engage in IDI events. She was involved in an academic seminar commemorating Fethullah Gülen at the University of Toronto's Victoria College last year.

"If everyone in the world lived their religion properly, there would not be any wars," says Leyla, paraphrasing Gülen's teachings on interfaith dialogue. She says the event helped her feel connected to her university and her upbringing. "It felt like I went back to times where our schools [in Turkey] were hosting these kinds of things."



IDI GTA

Soup mixes assembled by IDI volunteers.



Malik Dieleman



Malik Dieleman

IDI GTA's office space.

to hear a priest say this. He said, you can believe that Muhammad was a prophet as long as what you believe about Jesus in your heart and in your mind does not change. Then my husband said, 'Well, I guess if Father Dave – that was his name – said that, there is no harm for me to believe too that Muhammad was a prophet.' And that helped our marriage to continue."

For the past fifteen years, dialogue has enriched Leyla's life. On most Sundays she attends Mass with her husband. While most of her co-workers are secular and not particularly open to either faith or a foreign culture, she finds that interfaith work does affect her interactions with hospital patients. It helps her to be more open and understanding towards them.

"Dialogue starts at the basic human level," she says. "You cannot do that much coming from the top. You need to start interacting with people because that is how trust starts. Also, I do not have to worry about the big picture. I can pray for the big picture to change. So I do my part and pray that everyone else will do their part too." Leyla does her part by volunteering at events, organizing food and other supplies, and through IDI's 'Meet your Neighbour' program, where Muslim families open their homes to guests from other faith traditions.

'KNOW ONE ANOTHER'

IDI's stated goal is to contribute to social cohesion. How does that work in a society where social cohesion does not come naturally? Fatih does not have a good answer, but he believes that social cohesion and diversity are two quite different things. A diverse society can easily produce social cohesion, but it depends on connections between groups. "As IDI, we would like to promote personal interactions to let people from different groups engage with each other to see the commonality that we share. Then diversity can lead to social cohesion. Otherwise, people always have their own opinions without interacting with others."

According to Fatih, to engage in interfaith dialogue is a responsibility given by God. This follows from the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad, which Muslims try to imitate. Maryam Siahpoosh, a scholar of religion who engaged in formal Catholic-Shia dialogue during her studies in Tehran, admires Hizmet's practical view and largely shares this understanding. She references Quran 49:13, which reads: "O Humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous among you. God is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware."

Shiahpoosh says this verse captures the importance of dialogue. "It means that it is okay to be different; it is okay to have your belief, but you can learn from each other, you can know better because of each other."

**names have been changed for the safety and privacy of some interviewees.*



Matthijs Kronemeijer

Matthijs lives in Toronto with his wife Brenda and daughter Lydia. As a student of Arabic he memorized the opening sura of the Quran, and it has stayed with him.

THE JOY OF CREATION

First I built a plywood crib, then I moved on to cabinets, trim and baseboards. | **Anne van Arragon**



Anne van Arragon

Anne's home in the beautiful Annapolis Valley.

BESIDES THE TRADITIONAL "FEMALE CRAFTS," I've always been interested in making things with wood. Among them was a plywood crib for my first son, sturdy enough, but with no stiles it would never have passed expert guidelines. More successful were several hutch and buffet units that are still in use by the next two generations.

When we started farming in the Annapolis Valley, our old house was U-shaped, with two wings heading north. During the 1990s, I had the wings removed, making the house a lot more manageable. One day, I was watching a carpenter hammering away at the new back wall at fifteen dollars an hour. Hammer, nails, saw – it was straightforward work based on logic. It occurred to me, "I can do that!"

Eventually I took a couple of woodworking courses, and invested in every tool from table saw and planer to Makita chop saw and router. I'm still happy with my buffet and hutch, the first and only china cabinet I've ever owned, complete with half-lap joints on the glassed-in doors and made from wide floorboards saved from the downsizing of our farmhouse, which was built around 1839. Gorgeous fine-grained wood like that came from old-growth trees, unavailable at any building supply store.

> There's such satisfaction in seeing what we can make with our hands.

A WINTER OF BUILDING

By the time my retirement house was under construction, I felt confident enough to tackle all the finishing work. In what would become the living area, I set up a big plywood table, table saw and pretty much every other tool I had, and spent much of the winter building. As a gardener, building wide windowsills for plants was a no-brainer. I made them out of 2" by 12" pine, resting on the 2" by 8" framing.

The living area was open concept, so I chose lower kitchen cabinets with open shelving above. My neighbourhood welder made the heavy steel support frames, and I added pine shelves to carry the stuff I use daily, like plates, bowls, mugs, canisters and an oatmeal cooker. The lower cabinets required learning to use metal slides for each drawer: a new skill. Ditto for a floor-to-ceiling bathroom cabinet.

TRIM AND STAIRS

I stuck with solid white pine everywhere: baseboards and all the window and door trim. That part was somewhat fussy, with a lot of 45-degree angles. Considering I failed Grade Nine geometry long ago, I didn't do too badly. The pine trim goes well with the post and beam construction of my living area.

Building stairs was beyond my competence, but I did make every riser and step, spindle, handrail and newel post myself. A carpenter friend put it all together.



Submitted

The handles on Anne's china cabinet were made by a local blacksmith.

I hope visitors don't look too closely at the door hinge mortises, which are uniformly messy. But I'm not a perfectionist, so it's good enough, and I saved many thousands of dollars.

There's such satisfaction in seeing what we can make with our hands. Some days I really understand how the Almighty felt when he looked at his creation and saw that it was good.



Anne van Arragon

Anne lives on a farm in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley.

THE CAMPUS PARTY PANDEMIC

Police officers deployed pepper spray to subdue an out-of-control homecoming party at the University of Guelph. What were Christian students doing in the midst of the chaos? | **Jennifer Boone**



Caught in Guelph

According to a Facebook post by the Ontario Paramedic Association: "Guelph General Hospital treated about 60 Homecoming-related patients over the weekend, while local paramedics sought help from neighbouring services."

IN SEPTEMBER, A PARTY IN GUELPH, ONTARIO, quickly escalated into a full-blown street riot as more than 5,000 university students celebrated homecoming weekend.

The party took place on Chancellors Way, an off-campus student housing community beside the University of Guelph (UofG). Videos and photos across news platforms and social media show hordes of students partying on litter-strewn streets, throwing beer cans and hanging out of apartment windows as police push through the masses with shields. Fights broke out, music blared, beer cans were thrown skyward, teens climbed buildings and the area's hospitals were choked with the aftermath.

In the wake of the wreckage, Peter Schuurman posed an important question in his blog *Sensus Divinitatis*: "What is the university for?"

Sara DeMoor is a campus minister at the University of Guelph. In her 10 years in this position, she said she does not remember a homecoming "where such concerning behaviour was happening."

University homecoming parties are common in Ontario, she told *Christian Courier* (*CC*), and university administrations often work with local law enforcement to manage events. But a party of this scale is nearly impossible to prevent or shut down. "The administration definitely has a role to play, but from their perspective, they actually have no jurisdiction there," DeMoor explained.

THE EXPECTED RITE

Schuurman said the culture of partying is an expected rite of student life outside the classroom.

DeMoor agreed, although she said this doesn't apply to all students. "I think there is an assumption that some students come to university with, that it's the time to push back against boundaries. For some students and in some families and communities, there is this expectation that you've got to live a little in college, that this is the time to party because when are you ever going to again?"

Campus parties can quickly shift from group hangouts to dangerous situations when drugs and alcohol are introduced. What might be a fun event for one person can easily be a nightmare for another; only a week before homecoming weekend, 16-year-old Nash Dunlop was killed at a local house party, and two teenagers were charged in his death. The community was still reeling from the death of Dunlop when students took to the streets to party. And in the midst of all of it, social media blew up with the news that seven fraternity brothers from Cornell University were accused of drugging and gang-raping a woman for over seven hours.

The fact that university culture creates the conditions for such horrors displays a deep flaw in the system, Schuurman wrote in his blog.

DeMoor echoed this. "The drinking, the partying and the overdoing it is a symptom of something. It is a problem in and of itself, for sure, and it's a public health concern," she said. "And as a campus minister, one of my ongoing deeper questions is why? Why does this seem so appealing? Why are some students wanting to escape from their lives or to get so drunk that they can't remember? What does it say about the reality that students are experiencing?"

She added, "There's always too much drinking. There's always ambulances. It's never something that the university approves of or wants to happen."



Redeemer University

Peter Schuurman.



Guelph Campus Ministry

Sara DeMoor.

Why are you here at university?

THE SOCIAL MEDIA PROBLEM

But there is no easy solution. Although the UofG has worked through various alternatives, Chancellors Way remains the safest place for the party. If the police shut it down before it can start, people will just use social media to organize a relocation. "The kids are just going to end up in neighbourhoods where families live," DeMoor told *CC*. "It's going to diffuse into more places where the police can't actually keep track of all of it."

But after this year's property damage, hospitalizations and widespread social media attention, the university and local law enforcement might need to put their foot forward. "There's been a SWAT team in the last couple of years, ever since covid," DeMoor said. "But I've never heard of them having to be active. This year, they had to pepper spray people and suppress the crowd." The policing cost for the night was approximately $91,000.

As populations grow at the UofG, the partying problem becomes increasingly difficult to address. Social media only exacerbates the situation, as students turn to their feeds to find the best party in their area. Crowds, no matter how raucous, only attract more members, even when videos show people throwing glass bottles and starting fires.

With events like this, DeMoor said there's a mindset of "I'm not gonna get caught; I'll stay in the periphery, I just want to see it."

This mob mentality creates conditions that can result in injuries, property damage, sexual assault and fatalities.

"It would not be that hard for someone to be killed," DeMoor said. "You get 5,000 people angry or panicked [and] you've got trampling."

CHRISTIAN STUDENTS

Despite the thousands of people who attended, the homecoming party was not the only opportunity to celebrate the beginning of the academic year. Christian students at the UofG who wanted to put distance between themselves and the party had the option to attend a retreat off campus. DeMoor said, "Sometimes we [plan the retreat] intentionally to provide an alternative, a way to connect with the community."

Some Christian students attended the festivities as partygoers. Others chose to help a local church distribute thousands of cups of water to dehydrated and intoxicated attendees. And there were even students DeMoor talked to who didn't know the party was happening.

The Wednesday after the party, DeMoor was scheduled to lead a conversation at a campus ministry program. "We were in the middle of a series on what it means to be a faithful university student," she said. On the Monday before, she read Schuurman's blog. "It did really impact how I wanted to approach [the question]: Why are you here at university?"

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

The Guelph homecoming joins the queue of university party stories spreading across social media. Since the news broke of allegations of gang rape by seven Cornell students, thousands of women are coming forward to share their own "Jane Doe" experiences of sexual assault. The sheer number of victims of parties points to a much larger issue.

Although there is no easy solution, Schuurman encourages students to think of themselves as leaders of the next generation. The way university life should be "includes attending and participating in class, asking questions, working with their peers, completing assignments and tests and contributing to [the] communal well-being of their educational institution," said Schuurman. "What happens in the classrooms, the dorms and the hallways of the campus over time is what truly counts."



Jennifer Boone

Jenna is a fourth-year student at The King's University, which has a population that is less than a fifth of the size of the Guelph party.

AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF CANADIAN CHRISTIANS

'Our theology is lived differently from nation to nation,' says Janet Anstead, newly appointed general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches. | **Meghan Kort**



Marcelo Schneider at the WCC

Janet Anstead.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO HOLD 16 MILLION CHRISTIANS TOGETHER? That is the daily question set before Janet Anstead, the newly appointed general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). The council represents 85 percent of the Christians in Canada, those who belong to its 26 member denominations.

At a service on November 18 at Queen of the Apostles in Mississauga, Ontario, Anstead will be commissioned as general secretary, a role she began in September. Before that, she pastored Mapleton Church of Christ near Aylmer, Ontario. She is the first general secretary from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a bi-national Canada-U.S. denomination with 2,887 churches, but only 25 of them in Canada.

"We are very much kind of the mouse and the elephant," said Anstead. Referring to this bi-national context, *Christian Courier* asked Anstead if she has noticed any major differences between church life in Canada and the U.S.

"There's a lot of social justice issues that are lived differently up here than down there. For instance, it's really a badge of honour for my colleagues in the U.S. to have been arrested. That's not such a big thing here," said Anstead, who pointed out that issues around racism are also centred differently, with more emphasis on truth and reconciliation with Indigenous communities in Canada. "Our theology is lived differently from nation to nation."

Anstead told *CC* that strong relationships between Canadian churches are key. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is in full communion with the United Church of Canada and relies on ties with Canadian churches for anti-racism and professional training.

CITIZENSHIP MATTERS

When it comes to preventing Christian nationalism, Anstead said we have a lot to learn from our southern neighbours: "Up here in Canada, we have been a little bit complacent about it. Some of the U.S. churches, including my own denomination, have a lot more resources available to help counter this misunderstanding of Christianity. But I think we're catching up [in Canada]."

The CCC's Commission on Faith and Witness is in the midst of a three-year project centred around the question: "If we are members or 'citizens' of the Church, what does this mean for other forms of our 'citizenship' in Canada today?" This group is exploring creative ways to share the findings.

"Maybe a podcast, maybe an interview, maybe something else," explained Anstead. "We are trying to focus more on producing resources that are available to people in the pews, not just the leadership."

The CCC hosts webinars and in-person events on a wide variety of current and ecumenical issues including: faith formation, the future of the church, poverty, human dignity, artificial intelligence, Christian citizenship, Indigenous spiritualities and religious freedom. In February, the CCC will facilitate a five-day event called Engage Difference! at Kanata United Church in Ottawa. The aim is to equip ministry leaders and community members to lead well across cultures.

CANADIAN DIVERSITY

The CCC also facilitates conversations for Canadian Christians across provincial divides, and Anstead said she's personally noticed some regional differences in the ways Christians operate. Of course her observations come with an important caveat: "As with all generalities – they fall short of capturing the nuance of the diversity that enriches us all." While acknowledging that every province has countercultural movements that don't fit these moulds, understanding provincial tendencies may help churches translate their spiritual sensibilities when they gather.

"B.C. has always seemed to be more open to trying new ideas and ways of being together ecumenically," said Anstead, while the Maritimes, which are also coastal and welcoming, have stronger ties to tradition. She acknowledges that her home province, Ontario, has enjoyed a privileged position historically and economically: "Perhaps this leads to a sense of complacency about our right to be at the table of any discussions and that our voice will always be heard – perhaps to the detriment of other voices."

In the Prairies, Anstead described "a shift toward a less socially progressive ethos" and acknowledged the challenges of separatist sentiments. In Quebec, Anstead said, "the rise of laïcité brings a unique challenge to Christians and all people of faith in that province." As for the territories, Anstead said she is ready to learn and cannot yet speak to their spiritual sensibilities.



Marcelo Schneider at the WCC

WCC Pilgrimage Reference Group meeting in Vancouver in September.

CONVENE AND CONNECT

Anstead's predecessor, Peter Noteboom, who is ordained in the Christian Reformed Church, compares the job of general secretary to being a telephone operator with a giant switchboard. "On any given day the general secretary convenes, connects, leads, supports four to six different groups of church leaders from across Canada and from different Christian traditions on topics they care about," said Noteboom. "I think it would surprise people to learn of the massive connecting and articulating role of the general secretary."

The Canadian Council of Churches has a $1.8 million budget made up of donations, government grants and dues from member churches, prorated by denomination size. The largest contributors are the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, which gave $50,000 this year; the United Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, which each contributed $45,000; and the Anglican Church of Canada, which surpassed $30,000. The CRC, which has about 230 congregations in Canada, contributed more than $13,000. About 15 percent of the CCC's total budget is spent on administration and fundraising, with the rest used to run programs. The general secretary acts like a CEO, liaising between the board and staff, finding funding sources, creating budgets and supporting each program's growth.

Smaller denominations may not have as much to give financially to the CCC's operations, but they still enjoy an equal seat at the table. "We function on the forum model, which means at the governing board, the Roman Catholic vote has the same vote as the Disciples of Christ," explained Anstead. This, she said, is one of the main reasons she encourages smaller denominations to become members. "We all have an equal voice."

As for disaffiliated or non-denominational congregations, the CCC does not yet have a pathway to membership. While these churches can't be voting members of the CCC, they can participate in reference groups and working tables. Anstead says Project Plowshares, which is the CCC's peace research institute, has several contributors that aren't affiliated with member churches. The project turned 50 this year and is a key focus area for the CCC, bringing in over $600,000 in donations in 2025. "It is something we are very, very proud of," said Anstead.

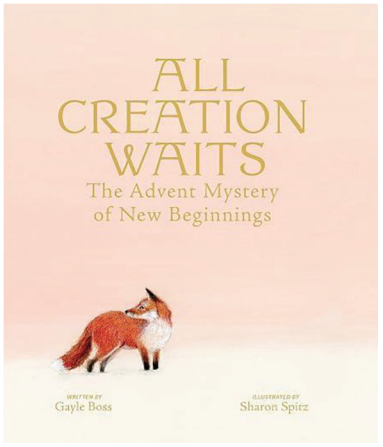
Anstead's joy in the work is obvious. While describing an upcoming CCC event, she said: "It's about walking together, not recognizing or demanding expectations from each other, but seeing the beauty and the relevance of diversity – and seeing diversity as a strength."

When asked what one thing he would write on a notecard and post by Anstead's desk as she takes on this challenging work, Noteboom said: "Friendship is the first principle of ecumenism. Take time."



Meghan Kort

Meghan is co-editor of Christian Courier. *She lives in Terrace, B.C. with her family.*



ALL CREATION WAITS – DELUXE EDITION: THE ADVENT MYSTERY OF NEW BEGINNINGS
Gayle Boss (Author)
and Sharon Spitz (Illustrator)
Paraclete Press, 2026.

MIDWESTERN ANIMALS JOIN IN ADVENT

Arthur Boers

I AM ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR GOOD RESOURCES to enhance spiritual life during Advent, my favourite liturgical season. So I'm especially grateful for *All Creation Waits*. This lyrical Advent calendar first came out as a slender paperback in 2016. It proved so successful, translated into a number of languages and with sales of over 100,000, that Paraclete has republished a deluxe tenth anniversary edition. This beautiful hardbound volume, with a sturdy slipcover, contains lovely full-colour wildlife illustrations throughout and – I kid you not – gilt-edged pages. It's a keeper, worth visiting and revisiting year after year.

All Creation Waits provides daily in-depth reflections for the 25 days leading up to and including Christmas, each focused on a Midwestern animal (the author lives in Michigan) and how that animal prepares for the coming winter. This might seem surprising for an Advent calendar, but for much of our history, Christians have believed there are two books of revelation: scripture – the Bible – and *nature*. God is revealed through the physical world, "the earliest sacred text given to us." As the Psalmist testifies: "The heavens tell the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork." (Ps. 19:1)


Sharon Spitz
Each page is beautifully illustrated.

Just as humans fast and relinquish during Advent, the wild animals described gather energy and focus on essentials, working hard toward difficult survival.

Boss cites much wisdom from the Christian tradition including: "Every creature is a word of God" (Meister Eckhart); "If you wish to know the Creator, come to know his creatures" (St. Columban); "The whole creation cries to us penetratingly, with a great cry, about the existence and the beauty and the love of God. . . . In all of nature we find God's initials and all of God's creatures are God's love letters to us" (Ernesto Cardenal); "Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. . . . If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things" (Dostoyevsky).

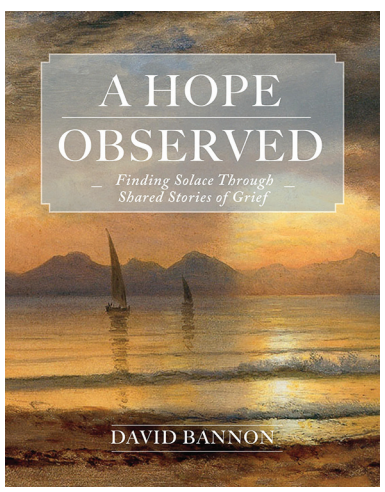
Boss explores how each particular animal – painted turtle, muskrat, black bear, chickadee, cottontail, honey bee, opossum, garter snake, firefly, and more – prepares for and deals with the encroaching darkness and cold when safety, warmth and food are all precarious. Just as humans fast and relinquish during Advent, the wild animals described gather energy and focus on essentials, working hard toward difficult survival. The author displays a matter-of-fact awe at the various strategies. The examples never feel preachy. I learned a lot; I did not know that the male cardinal's stunning scarlet plumage ("Clothed in the colour of passionate abandon") is enhanced because of the fruit he chooses to eat.

Then on the 25th day, we celebrate the one who came, the one for whom "all creation waits." Revisiting this book annually will be one more reason to consider Advent my favourite time of year.



Arthur Boers

Arthur, an Anglican priest in Toronto, is the Reviews Editor for CC and author of the forthcoming book, The Merciful Samaritan: A Trauma-Informed Reading of Jesus's Most Demanding Parable *(Eerdmans).*



A HOPE OBSERVED: FINDING SOLACE THROUGH SHARED STORIES OF GRIEF
David Bannon
Paraclete Press, 2026.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN YOUR GRIEF

Kristen Parker

GRIEF IS DEEPLY PERSONAL; no two people experience it exactly alike. What comforts one may not resonate with another. The journey through loss is rarely predictable. Yet there is comfort in discovering that our questions, emotions and struggles in grief are not ours alone. This book explores four parts of loss: Grieve, Cope, Hope and Love – that do not necessarily occur in a particular order.

Often, there are difficult questions: *Why did this happen? Where are my loved ones now? How can I go on?* David Bannon joins his reflections with stories of people who struggle, offering connections for readers who may otherwise feel isolated in their sorrow.

Bannon says: "There is nothing we can say that God does not understand . . . nothing . . . that God does not want to hear." Readers are introduced to a "Grief Bill of Rights," giving permission to mourn in our own way, at our own pace, without comparing our experience to others. Grief's cost is often connected to the depth of the relationship we have lost.

I especially appreciate Bannon's willingness to be vulnerable. He shares reflections from his own experience of loss, both the questions and the hope that shaped his journey. In a world where much of what we read feels perfectly polished and carefully curated, *A Hope Observed* is refreshingly raw and honest. The meditations do not tidy up grief or make it fit neatly into a particular narrative.

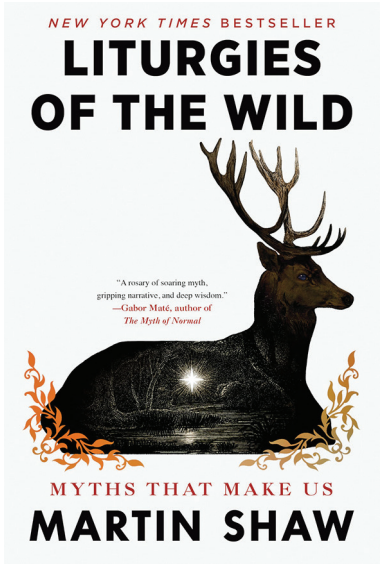
You can return to this book again and again. You can read it from beginning to end, or pick it up and see which story meets you where you are.

Grief is not something we must carry alone. Bannon invites readers to find comfort, connection and meaning as we learn how to live with loss.



Kristen Parker

Kristen, a freelance writer for CC, has a passion for words and houseplants.



LITURGIES OF THE WILD: MYTHS THAT MAKE US
Martin Shaw
Sentinel, 2026.

FOLLOWING MYTHS TO WISDOM'S SOURCE

Nate Vandenend

AS A YOUTH, MARTIN SHAW LEFT HIS CHRISTIAN FAITH. He calls such departing a "severance." Believing that story can both diagnose and remedy spiritual malaise, he sought wisdom in narratives from around the world: women marrying bears, men bravely doing impossible things for kings with the help of unlikely allies, ancient Greek and Northern Saami myths, Grimm brothers' fairy tales, Inuit and Celtic legends.

After rejecting Christianity, Shaw eventually sought out a Lakota Sioux medicine man, Wallace Black Elk. In a hot, dark sweat lodge, Black Elk leaned close and whispered: "The little hippie guy. Jesus. We knew he was coming. We'd heard his words. Long before white folks told us. He was in Turtle Island too. Don't give up on him now, he hasn't given up on you." Shaw acknowledges, "This is not what you expect to hear from a shaman."

After 30 years of reading, telling and writing stories, Shaw was ready to encounter the one he'd given up on, but who hadn't given up on him. In Dartmoor forest he was confronted by the "mossy face of Christ staring back at me," and all the stories found their centre. Shaw likens this to how J.R.R. Tolkien helped a not-yet-converted C.S. Lewis understand that Christianity is "true myth," and to how René Girard journeyed through story and myth to Christ, the innocent scapegoat. Similarly, Shaw is now returning to the faith of his youth and discovering that everything "was like before, but not like before."

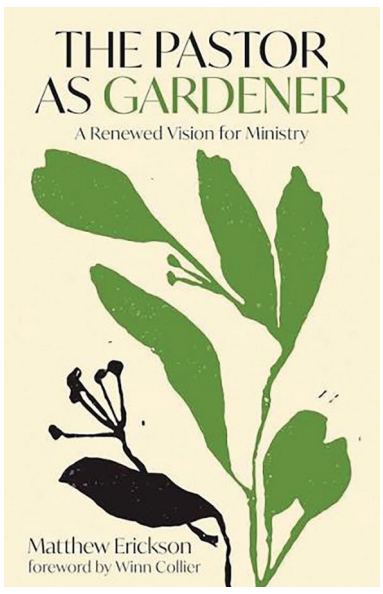
This book is about being human, formed of dirt and dust, animated by God's breath, with a story to tell. It is also about Jesus, the truest human, who hasn't given up on you, the one who saves as Word.

Give this to your friend who doesn't believe in Christianity anymore. Read it yourself, because we all need reminding of what it means to be human: severed from God in the fall, swept up at the threshold by grace, and stumbling back, returning, with the half-spoken prodigal prayer on our lips.



Nate Vandenend

Nate grew up in Southern Ohio and has seen his fair share of tractor pulls and crash derbies. He is the pastor of First CRC in Chatham, Ont. and drives a minivan.



THE PASTOR AS GARDENER
Matthew Erickson
Eerdmans, 2026.

PASTORS IN THE GARDEN

Jim Dekker

CITING DOZENS OF WRITERS THROUGH HISTORY, from Saint Ambrose to William Willimon, Matthew Erickson explores literature for pastors' spiritual and physical self-care and practice. He explains the need for this book by noting that secular society bows to no external spiritual, transcendent anchor. We live by internal feelings and pick (or not) from a plethora of beliefs. Churches suffer crises, well-known ministers plunge into moral scandals, and pastors quit ministry in droves. Additionally, covid exacerbated ecclesial pathologies. To top it off many, including pastors, battle debilitating spiritual emptiness.

Erickson responds from 25 years' experience as a youth pastor, church planter and senior minister. Immersed in scriptural themes and historical models of pastoring, he integrates spiritual disciplines for pastors' vocations into a book-long biblical gardening metaphor. From the Bible, he harvests dozens of agrarian allusions and characters to frame and guide pastors' vocations and lives.

ADAPTING AND RESTORING

When Mary Magdalene encountered the resurrected Jesus, she wasn't wrong to think of him as a gardener. Unwittingly yet prophetically, she identified him as the Word who created the Garden of Eden. In 1 Corinthians 3, St. Paul saw himself as a gardener, planting the seed in Corinth that Apollos watered, with God providing growth.

Avoiding abstraction, Erickson introduces us to a Kenyan farmer who adapted to South Sudan's arid climate and discovered ways to grow eggplants for refugees. Similarly, he cites James Rebank's memoir recording years of patiently restoring his three-generation family farm to productivity after fertilizers and pesticides depleted the soil.

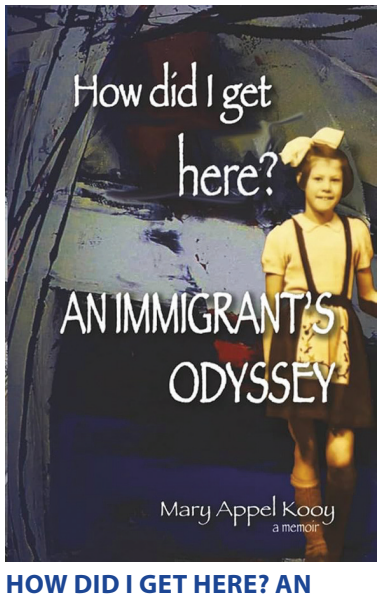
Mixing stories of depleted congregations and pastoral malaise, he also offers examples of pastors who discipline themselves diligently, not for efficiency, success or fame. Rather, they follow Jesus in fields of ministry, living in eschatological hope. They welcome empty, broken people to the hospitality, self-sacrifice and eventual joy of the risen Jesus, who builds the new heaven and earth with us fellow gardeners.

I recommend *The Pastor as Gardener* equally to strong or beleaguered pastors. Don't read it quickly. Full of wisdom and sound advice, it deserves slow, careful, meditative pondering. And don't read it alone. Invite colleagues and spouses; chew the book together; pray for honesty and vulnerability. Remember that the risen Jesus will return and that God's Holy Spirit accompanies us always.



Jim Dekker

Jim is a retired pastor, having lived and pastored in Latin America and Canada. He wishes he could have known this book sooner in life.



HOW DID I GET HERE? AN IMMIGRANT'S ODYSSEY
Mary Appel Kooy
Carnelian Moon Publishing, 2025.

HOW DID I GET HERE?

Allan Romkema

THE NARRATIVE ARC IN MARY KOOY'S *How Did I Get Here? An Immigrant's Odyssey* is framed by the encouraging voices of a Dutch community leader, a high school principal and a faculty advisor. Yet the emotional content is dominated by a far more formidable force: her mother. Only by rejecting her mother's voice does Mary find her own.

This memoir details a displacement that shapes her academic path. Focusing her research on how narrative influences life, her own discovered voice then builds a framework for educators where storytelling is central. The struggle to reconstruct her past is reflected in the book's structure. Each chapter is visually designed as a faded image of the cover's backdrop, mimicking the hazy, delicate process of memory recall.

This book is a welcome voice among recent narratives emerging from the postwar Dutch diaspora. While the first generation assimilated quickly due to shared cultural traditions, second-generation writers prove that true integration operates on a much deeper, more complex level.



Allan Romkema

Allan lives in and between three languages and cultures: Dutch, Frysk and English. Throw in some Kuiper and Shakespeare, psalms and organ, and stir.



That toddler tantrum in the toy aisle is telling us something, says author Jessica VanderWier. Illustration made for *CC* by Noelle Bylsma. @paperclips.art

BORN WISE

Why bad behaviour might actually be a good thing.

Marlene Bergsma

"MAYA HAD another toddler tantrum in the grocery store this afternoon."

"My grandchildren never hear the word 'no' – unless they're with me."

"Did you hear the one about the Porter Airlines flight from Victoria that was cancelled because a child refused to be buckled up for take-off?"

We live in a world of mommy-bloggers, Instagram influencers and no shortage of parenting advice to validate children's feelings, yet parents are stressed, youth anxiety levels are at epidemic levels, and the Canadian government has announced a new men's health initiative because boys and young men are not okay.

In all this chaos, is there a right way to raise children?

Registered psychotherapist and parenting influencer Jessica VanderWier from Ontario's Niagara Region, believes she has something to offer frazzled parents and teachers: the simple realization that our children are born wise.

"The environments in which we are raising children now are actually not helping them," VanderWier said. "I am seeing a huge shift, even clinically, from the pandemic to now. I've seen six years of the struggles children are facing. Kids are burnt out, they're exhausted, they're over-scheduled and they have no time for play.

"And we can see in the research that kids' mental health struggles are really on the rise. So why are kids more anxious than they've been in the last 20 years? Something is not working about the way we are raising our kids right now."

DECODING TANTRUMS

Granted, VanderWier has spent the past 15 years helping children – and their parents – who are struggling enough to need a professional's help, but from her interactions with everyday parents in her neighbourhood, church and her children's school, she is seeing a general pattern.

The old ways of "discipline" are gone. Parents and teachers seem at a loss with how to respond to children who act out at home, at school, in the grocery store or on the playground. At the same time, parents and teachers are under intense scrutiny and pressure to get it right. When they fail, there's a cellphone ready to record in almost every hand.

VanderWier, who has three million Instagram followers and has supported thousands of parents with courses and resources, says she advises parents and teachers to see the thrashing three-year-old, the screaming six-year-old or the troubled teen as children simply trying to tell their parents something important.

"What I found, time and time again in my work, was that the behaviour I saw was so much more than a child acting badly for no reason," she said. "There was always something else going on underneath, and it was usually some kind of trauma or unmet need."

For VanderWier, the answer was not a system of rewards or punishments to encourage proper behaviour, but rather "helping the grown-ups around these children learn how to nurture their relationships with this child," so that the child would trust them, and then through that trust they would begin to listen, and the behaviours would improve.

Although it was not what she learned in university or in her first job, VanderWier's early success as a clinical therapist and in private practice led her to suggest that parents decode their children's tantrums and intransigence, and respond with curiosity and connection instead of punishment.

"What fixed it was never actually punishing a child" with time-outs, restrictions or taking away an iPad or cell phone, she said. "These kids were already getting every punishment."

As the demand for support grew, VanderWier realized she was leaving some children behind. "These kids needed help now, but I was just saying the same thing all the time. I thought, why do I have to do this individually? I can do it in a support group. Parents could talk to each other, and they could get the tools and support now."

One parent group became two, and then three. She started *Jessica Grace Blog*. She got married, had a child, and was starting to feel like the workload was not sustainable. A session with a pair of highly educated academics provided her next inspiration.

"They both were accomplished in their fields, and they were saying: 'Why didn't we know this? Like it feels so silly that we had to come and pay you to learn that tantrums are developmentally normal and we just need basic skills to respond to them. All our friends would benefit from this.'"

She created an Instagram account, now called Nurtured First,



Jessica VanderWier's book, *Born Wise*, due out in May, is available for pre-order from Penguin Life.
Scan here to read VanderWier's seven tips for grandparents.

and she simply started telling stories about what she was seeing in her work with children, "and it exploded. I guess people were hungry for it. They asked, 'where can I get more?'"

By then, pregnant with her second child, VanderWier and her husband, Scott, decided to record her advice as a course, called *Parenting Little Kids.*

"We did this in the evening, after work, in our spare time, when I was 37 weeks pregnant and our daughter was sleeping. I just wanted to get this recorded before I had this baby. We were both working full-time, but people were asking for it and we thought, if it helps one family, we're happy."

The 35-lesson, five-hour course and accompanying workbook (since re-recorded and also available as a 200-page transcript) took off, "way better than we expected. We started selling it in February 2020, during the pandemic, and the demand from parents was way more than we anticipated."

Eventually, both VanderWier and her husband quit their day jobs, moved to Niagara to be closer to the small-town farming communities where they had both grown up, had another baby and decided to make Nurtured First their passion and their profession.

And in May 2027, VanderWier will release her first book, *Born Wise: How the forgotten wisdom of childhood can help us raise a new generation.*

'I DON'T THINK KIDS ARE BAD'

Although she had always loved to write, penning a book was not something she had planned, and she had previously rebuffed some publishers' offers.

"But through all these years of working with parents and children, I've kept journals of observations and the patterns and things I have found interesting, and I had all these stories I wanted to tell," she said.

"And I was forming this theory that we are looking at kids wrong. I don't think kids are bad, the way we've seen them to be. And I was realizing in my work with parents that we can actually learn a lot from children.

"Children are actually wise, and we are not seeing it. People are blaming it on screens, but I think there is more than that going on."

Traditional discipline, a system of rewards and punishments, often appears to work in the short term, VanderWier says. "It might work momentarily, because a child's deepest desire is to be in good relationship with their parent." The child might stop their difficult behaviour. But every time you punish a child or respond in frustration, "you are creating a rupture in the relationship, and by the time your child hits the teenage years, you are left with no plan for discipline.

"That's why we need to look long-term. Why is the child acting that way in the first place? There's always a reason. Behaviour is communication, and my book is helping parents understand and to get curious about why."

WISDOMS OF CHILDHOOD

VanderWier has distilled her experience into 10 wisdoms of childhood – innate and healthy responses and needs for human beings to flourish. After two introductory chapters explaining her theory and how she came to understand, use and see it succeed, there's a chapter for each wisdom. (See sidebar.)

Each chapter describes the wisdom, explains what happens when children can't rely on it, and offers suggestions for nurturing it. She includes examples of real conversations with parents who try cultivating it with their children and who reap the resulting rewards.

And for parents who are coming to this information late in their parenting journeys, or who didn't have childhoods where their own wisdoms were recognized or nurtured, VanderWier includes gentle invitations to reconnect with their teenagers or with their childhood selves, recognizing the wisdom that has been there all along.

"It's never too late. I have seen adults repair their relationships with their adult kids. You will have to deal with the consequences of those ruptured relationships in the early years, but there's always room to repair."

It's the same with adult children as it is with toddlers.

"You make your child feel seen and heard, showing up for them. As you do that, you build the trust back up."

STILL SAY 'NO'

While her approach to parenting is definitely gentle, VanderWier thinks the term gentle parenting has been misused or misunderstood, often provoking online critique. Grandparents or grocery aisle onlookers are often baffled or downright annoyed by what seems like an abdication of responsibility or inappropriate deference to children.

VanderWier believes in saying "no" to children, and firmly defends parents' right to be in control. In fact, she says parental authority is essential for children's well-being.

"I think there needs to be a hierarchical relationship between parents and children," she said. "Children should not be at the same level; they shouldn't be your friends. Your job is to lead them and guide them, not by shaming them but by having a relationship where they know you are looking out for their best interests. They need to be able to depend on you and know you are in charge."

BORN 'VERY GOOD'

VanderWier, a Christian who grew up in a Christian home and attended Christian schools, realizes that in high-control religious environments or in the context of the doctrine of original sin, her understanding of each person's inherent goodness might be seen as heretical or dangerous.

She acknowledges that humans are complex, and we all struggle with unhealthy desires, causing harm, or saying and doing bad things. But from the beginning, she said God declared humans to be "very good. And it's not a parent's job to say, 'this is my child who is sinful and bad,' but to say, 'this is my child who I love, and I want to raise up well.'"

"And if they have desires in them that are not going to be helpful to them, my job is to teach and to guide them, similar to what Jesus modelled and came to do." VanderWier says God the Father's unconditional love should be our model for parenting. "It's the same role that we are to play for our children, to create environments where they can really thrive."



Jessica VanderWier's husband and children out for a walk near their home.

THE 10 WISDOMS OF CHILDHOOD

Authenticity: The ability to show up as your truest self.
Vulnerability: The ability to feel the fullest expression of emotion around safe people.
Play: The ability to imagine, construct, build, create and be curious about the world.
Trying: The ability to keep trying new things, taking on challenges and making mistakes.
Longing: The ability to desire and yearn for something that you don't have.
Joy: The ability to want to exist, even when life is tough.
Touch: The ability to find comfort in hugs, snuggles or even a back massage.
Body Confidence: The ability to believe that your body is good, as it is, right now.
Care: The ability to take care of and be kind toward oneself and others.
Hope: The ability to believe that there are good things waiting for you.

From Born Wise*, by Jessica VanderWier.*



Marlene Bergsma

Marlene is a mother of three and grandmother of four, who thinks her children are doing a fantastic job raising her grandchildren. She is glad to see the next generation loving and nurturing well.

MARTINDALE PLACE
A CHRISTIAN RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

INDEPENDENT
SENIOR LIVING

Our welcoming community empowers seniors with independence, security, and a vibrant life enriched by faith, wellness, and new experiences





It Starts with a conversation

Connect with our Accommodations Coordinator for a friendly chat. We invite you to visit and see if our community feels like the right fit for you.

accommodations@martindaleplace.com
905-988-9414
facebook.com/martindaleplace
martindaleplace.com

Link Charity
Canada Inc

For 25 years Link Charity has served donors, benefitting both them and their chosen charities.With renewed fervour we continue to encourage and espouse the "principles of charitable giving and stewardship to facilitate donors in the strategic distribution of gifts."

To pursue the following options - please connect with us through our website, email or phone.

- **Charitable Loan** – share excess growth of your conservative fixed investment with favorite charities
- **Appreciated Securities** – a tax effective way to give philanthropically though Link's many brokerages
- **Donor Advised Fund** – split tax planning and receipting from donations - to maximize options
- **Charitable Gift Annuity** – a tax receipt upon investment, income for life, & residual donation (bypassing estate)
- **Estate planning,** review, advisory & executorship

Link Charity - "A charitable partner for this life & beyond"

Online - **linkcharity.ca**
Email - **Donorsupport@linkcharity.ca**
You can reach Ken at **647 222 3704**

FAITHLINK
FUNERAL CARE
Meeting you where it matters.

We can help you when you need it.

At your home | In your church facility
Serving the Golden Horseshoe

Let us show you the Faith-Link Difference.


Rick Ludwig

Greg Luxon

Kayla Ruggi

Diane Russell

Garnet VanPopta

It's comforting to come home.
kitchingsteepeandludwig.com/faithlink
1-800-737-8275

KITCHING STEEPE & LUDWIG
FUNERAL HOME LIMITED

Christian School Foundation

Students attend their schools for over 1000 hours each year.

You can impact their lives today and tomorrow with a gift to Christian Education.

Contact the Christian School Foundation where we draw donors and Christian schools together to expand the influence of Christ.

Want to learn more?
office@christianschoolfoundation.ca
christianschoolfoundation.ca
905-769-0798





Wikimedia Commons

"Ukrainian dancers" by Edgar Degas (1899). National Gallery of London.

I CANNOT DANCE, O LORD

Sandy Ayer

I cannot dance, O Lord, unless you lead me.
– Mechtild of Magdeburg

I cannot dance, O Lord, so please don't ask.
I'm sure You know a fitting metaphor
or holy trope, for I refuse to mask
my deep aversion to the dance hall floor.

Yes, heaven knows I've paid my ballroom dues
in clumsy polkas; clutched and waltzed astray
my share of nervous girls in gym class shoes.
The trauma lingers leaden to this day.

The Bible treats the subject en passant,
and women do the honors as a rule.
So none but female mystics ever want
to twirl; the males must fear to play the fool,

for they know Second Samuel six sixteen,
where Michal vents her wrath and cannot stay
her pent-up scorn, and shame at being queen,
on seeing David's shocking exposé.

What is the dance the Godhead does above?
Perhaps we hear the boom and see the flash,
when in a burst of kinesthetic love,
You do the holy three-step with panache.

I see it now: the church will dance as one,
for You're the bridegroom-lead, and we're the bride.
So long as it's not ballroom, I could hone
my folk-dance skills, for on the Other Side

on flora soft on heaven's remade earth,
we'll boogie up a hora with élan.
If some are shy to join the festal mirth
and You need help recruiting, I'm Your man.



Sandy Ayer

Sandy lives in Calgary. He began writing poetry-as-memoir about 20 years ago and has been published in Crux, Alberta Views, The Blue Jay *and* Poems for Ephesians.

KEEP DOING POLITICS (BUT NOT ALL THE TIME)



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.

I TEACH, study and write about politics for a living, but that's not really because I love politics. Politics is frustrating, exhausting, frightening and (above all) endless. Even at its best – those moments when the right cause or candidate wins the day; when a key policy priority is made good on; when you feel the joy of solidarity and unity – successes are provisional and trade-offs are inevitable. I sometimes envy my colleagues who get to teach poetry, who can tarry with their students over something intrinsically beautiful and edifying, bending their minds and hearts together to understand more deeply the best and permanent things human beings create (I know that's a naively idealistic picture of what studying poetry is . . . let me have my comforting illusions).

THE NUMBER ONE RULE

At its most beautiful, politics is about cooperative action to promote the common good. Individuals, communities, institutions and leaders put their minds and their power together to make decisions that will create a public framework of laws, institutions and public goods within which everyone can flourish. But in a broken and complex world, doing that is basically never a matter of perfect unity or consensus. We are divided in many ways; from disagreements about policy to conflicting loyalties, antipathies and interests. In anything like a free society, politics will almost always involve as much disunity and competition as it will solidarity and common purpose.

I tell my students that the number one rule for understanding politics is to remember that not everyone pays as much attention to politics as they do. This is partly because people have busy lives, but also because paying attention to politics involves unpleasant feelings of conflict, division, frustration and cognitive dissonance.

ANTI-POLITICS

It is understandable and even creditable that we prefer unity over division, consensus over argument, and collective achievement over compromise. But those feelings also make us very vulnerable to a certain kind of political appeal: the appeal of anti-politics. Leaders selling anti-politics tell you that they will create unity, achieve final victories and end social divisions by forging a new (or restoring an imagined old) community of the people where we all basically think and feel the same and



Cagle Cartoons

share the same interests and aspirations. In other words, they promise that if you just empower them, then you never really have to do politics again; they will solve it.

I think that this is an important part of the appeal of the MAGA movement: Trump will solve social divisions and restore American greatness by expelling foreign elements and definitively defeating the "enemies of America" (the Democrats, the press, Canadian exports, etc.). But this appeal also helps to drive the agendas behind Alberta's referendum: just stop immigrants from ripping us off, give over powers to the Alberta government, and put Ottawa in its place (perhaps by separating) and all of the frustration, compromise, uncertainty and division you've had to deal with (brought home especially because of the response to covid) will be over. You'll always get the government you want and you'll never really have to think about politics again.

But the promise of achieving unity and the end of politics by concentrating power, expelling scapegoats and cutting ourselves off is a false promise. While we still sojourn in the *civitas terrena*, we're going to have to keep doing politics, even if it's also good to take breaks from it and read some poetry.

EU GETS KIDS RIGHT



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.

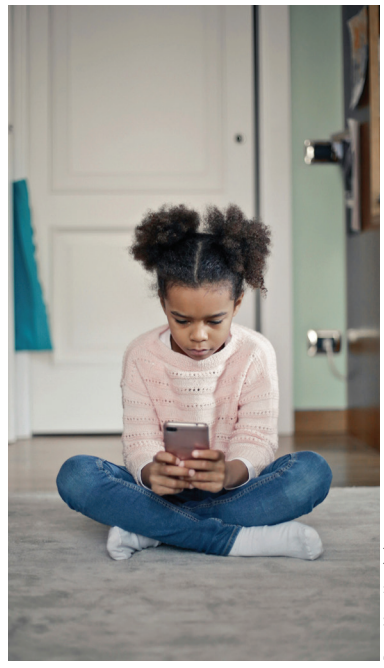
CANADA'S NEW interest in the European Union (EU) focuses on trade and investment. But Canadians would also benefit from greater alignment in other areas, such as public policy for children. One day after Prime Minister Carney's love-in at the EU parliament, a new EU Kids Act was introduced to address online safety. Children in Canada would benefit if Canada's Bill C-34, the Safe Social Media Act, were revised to align more with the EU approach. Better public policy for children contributes to the fact that many countries in the EU rank much higher than Canada in international comparisons of outcomes in child development.

BANS DON'T MAKE IT SAFE

In June, the federal government in Canada responded to a strong lobby for bans to keep young people off social media by restricting access to age 16 and up, in spite of evidence that such bans are not very effective and can lead to other problems. Bill C-34 also includes some measures that would require social media platforms to build safety into their products, but that component is weaker than the rules in countries that lead in good practices, such as the U.K. (It is worth noting that Australia, the model Canada followed, is now introducing additional legislation to implement safety by design measures.)

> It is good news that some governments are finally standing up to the powerful lobbies of companies that profit from the online exploitation of young people.

The proposed EU Kids Act leads with requirements that safety be built into the design of all online platforms on offer in member countries. That includes gaming sites and AI, as well as social media. The onus is on the service providers rather than expecting parents to police their children's online activities or banning young people from participation as digital citizens until they reach some magical age. By way of comparison, when families buy a car, they expect safety measures to be included. Car seats for children are highly regulated for safety. It is reasonable to expect the same approach for products that are the equivalent of online vehicles on the information highway. It is good news that some governments are finally standing up to the powerful lobbies of companies that profit from the online exploitation of young people. Canada could join the EU, U.K., Australia and others to provide more global leadership in this field.



Bruce Mars, Unsplash

PERMISSION BY AGE

An interesting feature of the EU Kids Act is the use of progressive age permissions. Children under age 13 may use child-friendly video-sharing services with parental supervision. From age 13 to 15, adolescents can use specially designed accounts with limited features for a limited time per day. At age 15, young people graduate to managing their own accounts. Residents in Ontario may recognize a similarity to a graduated approach to driver's licenses.

While the proposed EU online rules will be difficult to enforce, the principle of respect for the evolving capacities of young people with a gradual transfer of responsibility is important. It also responds to input from young people themselves, who want adult guidance as they learn to manage themselves.

BETTER OUTCOMES

The EU online safety rules are just one example of policies that treat children as persons with rights and as active, developing agents, rather than objects of protection by parents and the state.

The evidence shows better outcomes for youth when public policies respect their agency, rights and voice in decisions about them. A world designed with the best interests of children in mind would also be a better world for adults. The Bible said so long ago.

PEACEKEEPERS PARK



Cindy Kwantes Brown | *Guest Columnist*

Cindy is a retired social worker living in Abbotsford, B.C.

WHILE ON A visit to Ontario recently, I had the opportunity to visit Peacekeepers Park in the town of Angus (near the Canadian Forces Base at Borden). This outdoor park is in a lovely, peaceful setting of tall trees and wooden benches. Peacekeepers Park memorializes the service of United Nations (UN) Peacekeepers from Canada, specifically those who lost their lives on peacekeeping missions. It is beautifully done, and it was very moving to walk around the various displays.

SOME CELEBRATED, SOME UNSPOKEN

There are lists of names engraved on the walls. But in addition to that, there are also portrait walls with painted images of the deceased peacekeepers' faces, along with a short bio listing their hometown, family, age when they enlisted, place and date of death, and age when they died. There are UN observation posts and UN reconnaissance vehicles. There are banners telling the stories of specific Peacekeeping Missions (like the Battle of the Medak Pocket, in the former Yugoslavia in 1993), and one explaining that the 1988 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to all the world's peacekeepers. There is a memorial to First Nations, Métis and Inuit veterans. There are photo walls with photos from various peacekeeping missions around the world.

I was particularly moved by a monument with the words "Not All Wounds Are Visible," and a plaque which reads: "In memory of all those who served, went to foreign lands, came home, but could not defeat the demons within . . . we honour your service to country, we miss your comradeship, we will never forget you and your sacrifice. Proudly remembered by your brothers and sisters in arms." It was heartening to see the invisible wounds of PTSD and trauma recognized and honoured.



Cindy Kwantes Brown

A board celebrating Canadian peacekeepers at Peacekeepers Park, Angus, Ontario.

CLOSE TO HOME

Upon coming home and doing some research, I learned that over 125,000 Canadians have served in UN-sanctioned and international peacekeeping missions since 1947. I learned that the number of Canadian peacekeepers peaked in 1993 and is significantly lower today. I learned that the artist who painted the portraits of the fallen peacekeepers was himself a veteran. What had the most impact on me, however, was seeing the faces and reading the details of these individuals who signed up to serve for peace, to put their own lives on the line to help others in war-torn lands. Each of them left families and friends behind, and their lives were cut short. I felt proud to be a Canadian; humbled in the face of their sacrifice; saddened that war and conflict continue to create victims around the world; and grateful for those who step up to serve.

I have an uncle who served in a peacekeeping mission in Gaza and Egypt in the early 1960s, and other relatives who have served in the military. Being able to visit Peacekeepers Park was a truly meaningful experience. Particularly in the month of November when we remember and honour those who have served in military and peacekeeping efforts, I encourage anyone who has the opportunity, to stop and spend some time visiting this important but little-known park.

NOT IN ONTARIO?

There is another Peacekeepers Park in Calgary, as well as a Peacekeeping Monument that you can visit in downtown Ottawa.

A REFORMING FOODIE IN ROMA



Clay Kannard | *Guest Columnist*

Clay has lived in Italy for 13 years. He pastors a church in Rome and teaches theology, including a course on the theology of eating.

SI MANGIA BENE in Italia! You eat well in Italy! It's no secret. In December 2025, Italian food became the first national cuisine recognized by UNESCO. As someone who has lived in Italy for 13 years, I would say they made the obvious choice. People come from all over the world to visit the city I call home: Rome. Sure, there are beautiful monuments, thousands of years of history and amazing art to admire, but I'd guess most of the pictures filling our tourists' social media feeds are of pasta, pizza, gelato, a calice of wine or a spritz. Ask someone you know who has recently visited Italy what they loved, and I promise they will mention the food!

Everyone who knows me knows I am a foodie. When guests visit our church in the city centre and ask an Italian where to eat, they are quickly redirected to me, a non-Italian. When our family plans vacations, my wife researches sites to visit while I look for the best places to eat. It's great teamwork! However, as I grew in my understanding of how the gospel impacts every detail and sphere of life, I began to realize that my love for food tended to slide into idolatry.

THE STORY OF FOOD

My admiration for food didn't reach beyond the plates I ate from. If a meal was not amazing, my attitude could change for the worse. Dare I critique the dish my wonderful wife had laboured to prepare just to ensure I would get a better meal next time? What I needed was more than a comfortable couch to sleep on! I needed to reform my relationship with food. Scripture calls us to pursue the glory of God in everything, and thankfully, God's word has much to say about food.

Food appears throughout scripture, from the Garden of Eden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. God's design for food reminds us that it was created good and is to be enjoyed. It also shows us that we are creatures dependent on God's nurture and community with others. As Tim Chester explains in *A Meal With Jesus,* we were created to eat a meal with God.

Scripture also reveals what happened when humankind tried to feed itself apart from God. As a result, we continue to eat east of Eden in a world under sin's curse. Food continues to display God's goodness and grace, yet every person, process and pathway involved in bringing food to our mouths has felt sin's touch. For example, some of Italy's premium wines are produced through the exploitation of migrant workers, and some regions famous for their tomatoes have been affected by the mafia's illegal dumping of toxic waste.

A TASTE OF REDEMPTION

Scripture doesn't stop there, however. Throughout scripture, meals remind God's people of their dependence on him, create fellowship around the table, and ultimately point us to Christ, whose costly death gives true and eternal life. So while food reveals a world impacted by sin, it can also give us a taste of life being redeemed by Christ, including our relationship with food!



Submitted

Clay Kannard and *Tagliere* with *Proscuitto di Parma.*

This was the key I needed to become a redeemed foodie. After all these years in Italy, I still love a good plate of pasta! But I am learning that a good meal is about more than what is on my plate – it's about gratitude and praise to my Creator. Whether a Michelin-star experience or an ordinary meal, eating should invite us to "Taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8).

NETHERLANDIC SOJOURN



David T. Koyzis | *dtkoyzis@gmail.com*

David is affiliated with Global Scholars Canada. Read a more detailed account of his travels at http://byzantinecalvinist.blogspot.com/.

ALTHOUGH I have been hugely influenced by theologians and philosophers from the Netherlands, I have recently revisited the country for only the second time in, well, half a century.

The occasion for my visit was a speaking tour to several Dutch cities and conversations with people involved in the country's public and educational life. The visit was organized by three young men, including Samuel. I informally mentored Samuel during his studies in Canada several years ago. During our time together, we became great friends, and we continue to talk online on a semiregular basis. Through him I met the other two, one of whom had read my first book, *Political Visions and Illusions*, during his studies at the Free University of Amsterdam.

MULTI-CITY TOUR

Among other things, we travelled to the Kuyper Library in Abraham Kuyper's home village of Maassluis and spent some time with its curator Ton Sels. I then spoke at the Theological University in Utrecht, which had moved from its former home in Kampen a few years ago. The following day we drove to The Hague, where we ate lunch in the parliamentary dining room with Don Ceder, a member of parliament for ChristenUnie, one of three Christian parties in the Second Chamber. He had read and appreciated the approach taken in my book.

> A highlight was Sunday morning worship at the Grote Kerk in Nijkerk.



Hildebrand Bijleveld

David Koyzis with a bust of Kuyper in the temporary home of parliament, The Hague.

In the evening I spoke to the Scientific Institute – ChristenUnie in Amersfoort. This was less a formal address than an interactive interview with considerable audience participation. I found it a stretching experience because Canada lacks a Christian political party with a realistic opportunity to participate in government. The dilemmas ChristenUnie faces are quite different from those faced by, say, the Centre for Public Justice, a nonpartisan think tank on whose board I currently serve.

Finally, I spoke at one of a few Christian universities in the country, the Christelijke Hogeschool in Ede. And then it was on to Leiden for a podcast interview with *De Nieuwe Wereld.*

HISTORY AND LITURGY

Much of the week was filled with such events, but there was also time for sightseeing. We made several stops at important historical venues. I especially enjoyed the Paleis Het Loo, built by Willem III, the Dutch stadhouder who in 1688 became co-ruler with his wife Mary of England, Scotland and Ireland.

A highlight was Sunday morning worship at the Grote Kerk in Nijkerk, with a traditional Reformed liturgy including the Ten Commandments followed by the summary of the law from the gospels, a sermon based on Mark 1:1-20 ("*Kom achter mij aan*"), five Genevan Psalms and one hymn.

I was overwhelmed by the hospitality I received during my visit and the expressions of appreciation for my role in the various events organized on my behalf. Whether I will return I cannot say, but I will hold this experience in my heart for the remainder of my days.

CHICKEN COVENANTS



Heidi VanderSlikke | *hmvanderslikke@gmail.com*

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

A NOTICE from Chicken Farmers of Ontario arrived one morning, announcing a new and improved system of calculating our cost of production. More complicated than previous versions, it's also much more accurate and detailed. A sampling of producers would be selected to take part in the near future, it said. The lucky ones would be notified within the next month. Participation is mandatory.

It was presented a little like an Old Testament covenant without the bloodshed.

It was presented a little like an Old Testament covenant without the bloodshed. Blessings and curses: a fairly generous honorarium upon proper and timely completion (which told me already how much work is involved) OR, for failure to co-operate – a 2,000-kilogram penalty, plus production reduced by 30 percent until compliance is fulfilled. In case you don't speak the language of quota – trust me – that's a lot.

I muttered as I deleted the email. "Go away. Don't pick me. Please! Not me."

CHOSEN

The second email came two weeks later. Sure enough – we were among the chosen. Something between a moan and a scream escaped my lips at that moment. But I saved my rant for my unsuspecting husband when he came in for supper.

"I can't believe this!" I said, "Do you know how many times I've had to go through this stupid process?! Can't they pick on someone else? I spend my life filling out forms. Leave me alone." (It was longer and louder than that, but you catch my drift.)

Jack shook his head sympathetically. He most certainly knows how many times this has happened. He's had to listen to my complaints each time. "Do you want me to call them?" he asked.

"Oh, I'll call them," I said, clenching my jaw. "I'll tell them – I'm 70 years old! I've been through this too many times. My husband is going for knee surgery and I'm already overloaded this Fall. Find somebody else." But in my heart, I knew I was doomed. Nobody messes with the marketing board.

NOTHING IS RANDOM

Next morning, although still unhappy, I had simmered down. Cost Of Production (COP) panels are like jury duty. Nobody really wants to do it. Somebody has to. The COP formula is how we gauge our live price for chicken, trying to maintain a fair return for farmers on their financial investments, expenses and workload. If we're still fit enough to farm, I suppose we need to do our part for the industry.



Heidi Vanderslikke

Chicks newly arrived at the Vanderslikke farm.

So, tomorrow, when I'd rather clean up flowerbeds or rake leaves, I'll drag out last year's financial records. I'll sift through the information, scan dozens of pages and upload them to verify the lengthy questionnaire. When that's done, they'll assign me an entire crop cycle (nine weeks) wherein I'm required to record daily all the time spent on farm work. The whole thing is a five-year commitment. I snicker just a little. As if we'll be farming five years from now!

I can already picture papers spread all over my desk and my head feeling as if it's stuffed with cotton. Instead of continually grumbling, "Why me?" I'll try to think of my morning readings from Isaiah. Chapters bursting with God's sovereignty as he chooses his people remind me of the gracious and powerful calling he's placed on my life. Nothing is random. It's an eternal commitment.

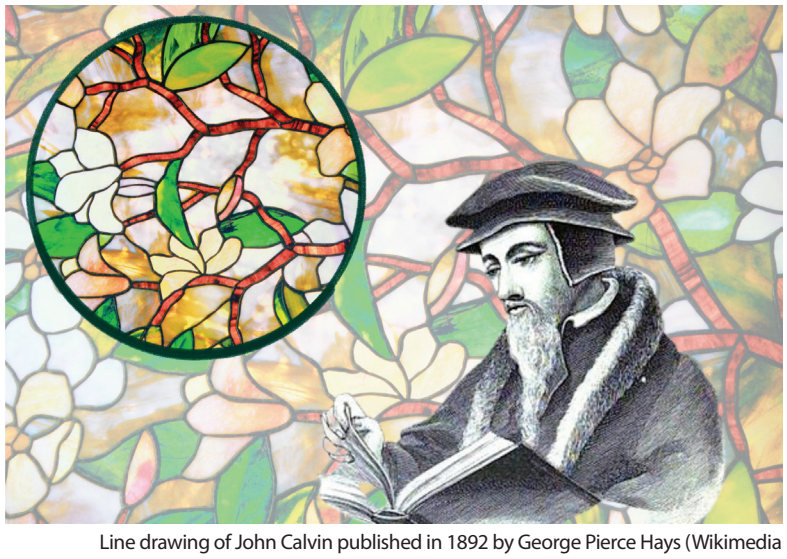
Well now – that's a good reason to ask, "Why me?"

CALVIN, SCRIPTURE AND CREATION



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

Rudy, whose father told him we need more Christian scientists than ministers, is an elder at Waterloo CRC and has retired from teaching psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University.



Line drawing of John Calvin published in 1892 by George Pierce Hays (Wikimedia Commons); stained glass image (Unsplash); edited by Maaike VanderMeer.

CALVIN IS COMMONLY QUOTED as saying we should read the book of the world through the eyeglasses of scripture (*Institutes* V1, 2:70). While both the Bible and the world are important sources of revelation, scripture has primacy. In contrast, the poet Christian Wiman in *Glimmerings* (which collects emails between him and theologian Miroslav Volf) suggests that because God's creation preceded the Good Book, we might use creation as a lens to clarify scripture. Creation has primacy over scripture.

WHAT IF IT'S BOTH?

I think both viewpoints are likely an overreach, as they imply that one position is always appropriate. Instead, we should say that in some cases primacy belongs to creation, while in other matters we need scripture in order to understand what we see in our world. While I think such a stance is reasonable, it begs the question: When should we give each pride of place, and how does one book of revelation impact our understanding of the other?

Here's a practical example. The deep history of our world as described by science is clearly at odds with the first eleven chapters of Genesis, which condense vast geological and social developments into the span of a few human generations. I have read and heard many well-meaning attempts by sincere Christians to fit the events described in early Genesis into our scientific understanding of history. They have never worked for me. Moving from the first human lives through the technological advances made by a few generations descending from a murderer (Gen. 4:17-22) stretches credulity. I find no evidence to support the idea that an ark filled with animals and a few humans restarted the world. I can only live in the modern understanding of the earth changing over a span of billions of years.

God loved his creation enough to enter into it and, through that act, lift it into a fullness that would not be possible otherwise.

So, in this case, what book of revelation do I take from and how do I honour the word of God in scripture? As I look at Genesis, I ask what lessons God is teaching us, not whether this is a literal historical account. I find that God created a good creation, that we are creative users of it and that we add richness to this world. I find that God loves creation and us, and that even when we fail in many ways, he will never destroy his works.

THE WHY AND THE HOW

In other places, I see scripture providing a solution the world alone cannot. Creation is filled with suffering. Bad things happen to good people. Scripture makes sense of this through the emptying of the Godhead: God himself was born as a refugee in a stable and allowed us to become children of God through Jesus, the Christ. In his Son, God walks with us and suffers for us so we can be made whole. To me, the overarching message of scripture is that God loved his creation enough to enter into it and, through that act, lift it into a fullness that would not be possible otherwise. Here scripture explains creation, providing the "why" to science's "how." We need to be open to God's teaching in both books.

LOVE IS ESSENTIAL TO FAITH



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.

WHEN I WAS in fourth grade, the same age my daughter Lydia is now, something happened that deeply influenced my faith. We were watching an interview on *School-TV*. The person interviewed was asked if Jews, Muslims and Christians believe in the same God.

"Yes," he said. There are differences, he added, "but it's still the same God."

To my school-age self, this was a real eye-opener, a liberating insight. (I would later learn that this is a belief of the Catholic church.) That interview was one of two or three events that helped me find a way into the Christian life – or into life in general – that occurred more or less around that time.

The truth is that between the ages of seven and ten I was going through a crisis of faith. Some things weren't right in my life. But I had no words to express them.

> Biblical faith is about personal growth in freedom, and love is always part of it.

PERSONAL GROWTH

Looking back 40 years later, a number of things fall into place. I was hospitalized as a toddler and had nightmares for months afterwards, suggesting a kind of trauma. In kindergarten, a substitute religion teacher upset me so much I had to be kept home. I also had an undiagnosed walking disorder that made me useless at sports. And some degree of neurodiversity played into it all. I did not function well in groups; I got overstimulated. There was too much going on; I could not process it.

The good news is that I came out of this state of life. From age 10 onwards, I began recognizing my own desire for faith and experiencing God's help or presence. When I entered Grade 8, my walking disorder was discovered and treated. Going through physiotherapy and learning to walk normally, which took about six months, created space for growth in sports and also in other areas. My school grades even went up, I think.

I was no longer terrible at sports, but my place in the social system at school was fixed. (I was a teacher's kid, by the way.) I also fell in love with a spirited girl whose dad was a missionary to Honduras. I have a funny recollection of trying to convince a post office clerk in Strasbourg, France, that I really needed a stamp for Honduras. In that way, I managed to express some affection to her across considerable barriers. To make the story even more tragicomic, she was actually Canadian. But it turned out I was not ready for dating, for a love relationship. I had too much baggage, was too isolated and had too much going on.



Submitted

Matthijs thrifted this French, late 18th century, freedom-themed plate this summer.

My journey in faith continued, however, bringing me into the Catholic church. That too was a liberating experience, although I soon hit new limits. Perhaps my situation was not typical, but it seems the Catholic church was hardly ready to receive converts well at the time.

TRUE FREEDOM

But to circle back to how I began: For me, biblical faith is about personal growth in freedom, and love in its various forms is always part of it. I find it hard to see how people can find true freedom to grow if their religion or church community defines itself in some kind of sectarian way, as "us against them." Faith in God – like hope and love – needs this free, unbounded space to take root and grow. This is another reason I find value in seeking understanding with people outside the Christian faith, in particular secular people and Muslims (see my article on pages 6-7). To find a common love, so to speak. We are not as far apart as we think we are.

A LEAP IN THE DARK



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.

"NOW I AM about to take my last voyage, a great leap in the dark."

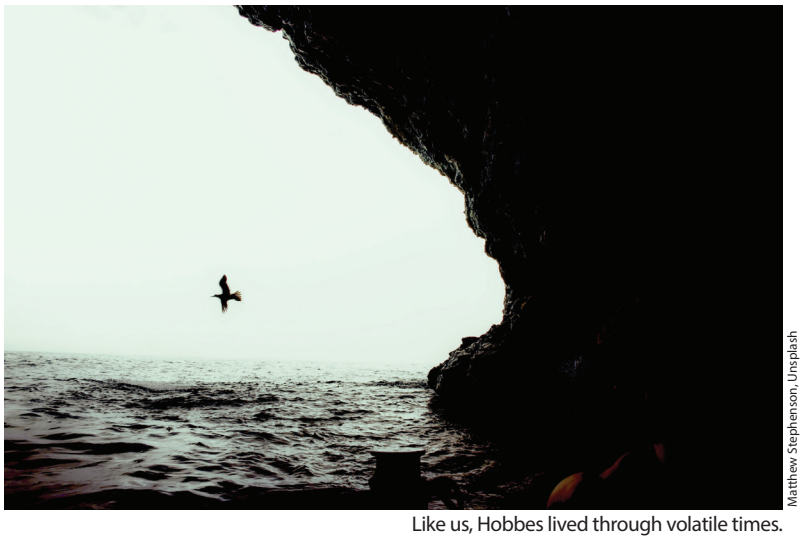
These are said to have been the final words of the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes in 1679. I'm always a bit dubious about last words. They are often conveniently eloquent. But let's give Hobbes the benefit of the doubt because this is a pretty good leave-taking.

Hobbes was born prematurely in April of 1588 when his mother heard of the coming invasion of the Spanish Armada. He later wrote that "my mother gave birth to twins: myself and fear."

To me, his final words bring closure to that rough beginning. He may have started in fear, but he ends in faith. Which is also apt for November. This month began with Hallowtide, the span of days that covers both Halloween and All Saints or All Souls Day. November invites us to look backwards and forwards. Now there is no denying that the days are darkening and the year is growing old. It might be a good time for old stories.

RISKY THEMES

Like us, Hobbes lived through volatile times. The seventeenth century was a time of political and military upheaval and enormous social change. There was the threat of invasion, a terrible civil war and several uncertain parliaments. All of which feels uncomfortably familiar today. During all this, Hobbes wrote to try to make sense of the world, God and society. His views fascinated some and made others deeply uncomfortable. His unconventional ways of understanding God brought accusations of atheism to his door, which made it too dangerous for him to publish further philosophical or theological writings. Despite this, he continued to write all his life. His final works were a poetic autobiography written in Latin and a translation of the Odyssey into "rugged" English verse. Maybe these were safer ways to explore his riskier themes of social commitment and the role of reason.



Matthew Stephenson, Unsplash

Like us, Hobbes lived through volatile times.

> Both the voyage and the leap are themselves acts of faith.

DAILY THOUGHTS

When I came across Hobbes' final words, I was struck by the two images: the voyage and the leap. Both are uncertain and even precarious, and both can also be great acts of hope. We hope to land feet firm on the other side. We do not know. We have faith, we hope, we trust in love.

Grounded in hope, both images also remind us of a certain circularity at play. The leap and the onward voyage encourage us to think about where we will land – in faith, in love, in the everlasting arms – and yet both the voyage and the leap are themselves acts of faith. They do not begin with us alone. Faith itself is a gift of God, calling us into voyaging, into leaping into the loving arms of God.

Hobbes' final words may have led us here, but these are not final thoughts. Daily, we hear this call to walk by faith in the details of our lives. That is where our faith is felt. Not only in grand conclusions, but in small and daily callings. The light shifts a little every day, and the calendar turns. We turn our faces towards God.

ELOQUENT REFLECTIONS, RAGGED PSALMIST



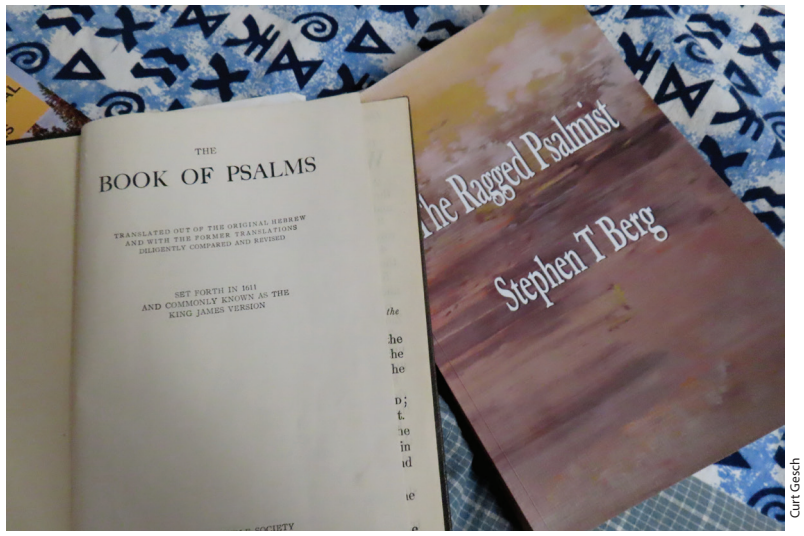
Curt Gesch | *cgesch63@gmail.com*

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

THOMAS WRIGHT does it; Cranmer, the famous Archbishop of Canterbury and genius behind the *Book of Common Prayer* wants everyone to do it, so I thought: I, too, will read all 150 psalms each month. I thought, "Why not jot down insights, questions and theological comments about each psalm?" I got up to Psalm 50 with my little notes and finished all 150 psalms out of stubbornness as much as from dedication.

Stephen T Berg reads through the Psalter each month. He did not write a note or two about "something he noticed" as I did. He wrote a book of poems – both prose poems and verse poems – that reflect in some way how each of the psalms addressed himself and his world.

In this approach, he is more like J.R.R. Tolkien than C.S. Lewis. Lewis was always making a point, defending a Biblical or philosophical teaching or creating fantasy worlds based upon allegory. Tolkien, Lewis' friend, did things differently (at least in regard to writing fantasy). Said Tolkien: "I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history – true or feigned – with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse applicability with allegory, but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author."



Curt Gesch

Stephen T Berg's poetry on the psalms is good to 'ponder in the heart,' says Curt.

BERG'S POETRY

For Berg, Psalm 47 ("Shout to God with loud songs of joy") evokes this response: "I want joy to claim you. Imprison you. I want you bound to a joy superfluous; oil of joy spilling over your head like a benediction, penetrating joints, jaw, bones and spleen."

Psalm 20 ("The LORD answer you in the day of trouble!") elicits a poem entitled "Mayo Clinic":

"Monolithic clinic of sickness-conquering science.

Gleaming machines calibrated for resurrection,

Drugs named after gods,

Procedures peer-reviewed and published by archangels,

Inspiring the kind of hope reserved for Adam."

I read on: What would Berg say about the psalms of imprecation (cursing)? I read the horrible desire for vengeance contained in Psalm 109 called forth in a "Gazan Elegy." Read it and you may weep.

SOUNDS THAT HEAL

If you were to use any of these pieces as a liturgical part of worship, the precise meaning of the lines may not be immediately comprehended by the hearers, but the very sound of Berg's phrasing and the scintillation and sibilance of his vocabulary allow those worshipers who are attuned to sensations as much as rationality to be calmed, delighted or challenged. Speak Berg's lines out loud and hear the alliteration, consonance, association, repetition, internal rhyme: all or any of these entered my mind, heart, brain, arms and legs through the medium of words read by a human voice.

I highly recommend that you buy *The Ragged Psalmist*, a work by a very talented literary artist, a practising Christian, a skilled commentator of our world and one who is as much at home in alders and willows and prairies as in Hebrew poetry. When I read a psalm from my old King James Version each day, I now read Berg's accompanying rumination and find myself alive in the word and words. The psalmists themselves, like Stephen T Berg, become my partner, my counselor, my friend.

DISABILITY NARRATIVES



Sara Pot | *thepotfamily@gmail.com*

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

FIVE YEARS AGO, I wrote in this column about *Crip Camp*, the documentary that tells the story of American disability activists and the fight that led to the Americans with Disabilities Act. I reflected on how our Canadian perspective on disability has been shaped by the work of the U.S. disability justice movement. One of the key players in that documentary was Judy Heumann, known as the "Mother of the Disability Movement." This month, the film *Being Heumann*, adapted from her memoir, will be released in select theatres and on Apple TV.

I had the privilege of seeing *Being Heumann* in September at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). While some of our family were able to attend, limited accessible seating prevented Rachel and Janneke from joining us. Oh, the irony.

WHAT I SAW

The opening scene shows Judy navigating a busy street, complete with curbs and construction. Filmed in Toronto and set in the 1970s, the camera angles were well placed in catching the physical barriers of the urban landscape. Watching it on the large screen at TIFF, I felt immersed in her struggle, something we still encounter in 2026 when travelling with our daughters who use wheelchairs for mobility. As the film progresses, the focus widens to include public responses to Judy and to a protest she is leading with fellow disabled activists. We see not only the physical barriers but also the attitudes and assumptions that limit inclusion and acceptance. It's a powerful must-see story.

Disability activism persists today. While significant changes have been made both in the U.S. and Canada, there are still societal barriers that need attention. Whether it is advocating for accessible playground surfaces, barrier-free entrances to buildings, sensory-sensitive lighting in grocery stores, or simply asking for patience and space in crowded train cars, food courts and public bathrooms, there is still work to do.

THE NEED TO REFRAME

In 2019, Judy Heumann wrote a white paper for the Ford Foundation entitled "Road Map for Inclusion: Changing the Face of Disability in Media." Addressing physical barriers is important, but so is changing the narrative of disability in the stories we tell and the stories we see.

World Cerebral Palsy (CP) Day is marked on October 6. Last month, FightTheStroke Foundation, a movement that supports young stroke survivors with CP released a video called *A Truly Cerebral Campaign*. It features and celebrates numerous children and youth who live with CP. As I watched it, I was reminded of the cheeky Down Syndrome video that was created earlier this year to mark World Down Syndrome Day – both videos challenging the (limited) story society tells about diagnosis and prognosis.

Storytelling, whether through oral tradition, films or books, shapes both our understanding of the present and our sense of what is possible. In the Northern Hemisphere, we're experiencing colder weather and spending more time indoors. Consider settling in with Judy Heumann's memoir in print and audio, or exploring the different documentaries and short films I've mentioned here.



Consider watching a documentary that challenges the narrative on disability this Fall.

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!

WHAT IF?



Bob Bruinsma | *bruinsmabob@gmail.com*

Bob is the father of three grown children, and a grandpa to three boys aged six, eight and ten in Edmonton, Alta. He has told stories to children in his church for many years.

WHAT IF YOU were playing outside and a nose walked past you? Not someone with a nose, but a nose without a someone. If that happened, you would be scared, wouldn't you?

Or, what if you were playing inside your house with your toys and suddenly two hands appeared and started moving the furniture around? Or started playing the piano? What would you do? Would you just keep playing with your toys? I don't think so. I think you would turn pale with fright and run toward your mom and dad.

Or, what if tonight, right after you got into bed, a mouth appeared? Not someone with a mouth, but a mouth without a someone. And what if the mouth said, "I want you to go to sleep right away. Tomorrow will be a busy day for you, and I want you to be well rested."

> Together, many people can do all these things.



Jason Leung, Unsplash

It's good that we're all different – we need each other!

Would you do what the mouth tells you to do? Would you go to sleep right away? I don't think so. I think you would be so scared that you wouldn't sleep all night.

Or, what if you were sitting in church and a pair of legs walked down the aisle and sat right down next to you? What would you do? Would you smile at those legs and say, "Hi, how are you?" I don't think so. I think you might jump up and scream. And why? Why be afraid of legs, or of hands, or of a mouth, or of a nose? Because legs and hands, mouths and noses are not supposed to be all by themselves. They are supposed to be part of a body. And, if they are not, if they are not part of a body, then something is terribly wrong.

WE ALL NEED EACH OTHER

Now, think of church as a body. And think of all the different people in the church as part of the body. One person is the hands and plays the piano. Another person is the voice and sings in the choir or preaches. Still another person is the legs and goes to visit sick people in the hospital. Another person makes the coffee for after the service, and all sorts of other people bring snacks to share. Still others look after the children, or teach Sunday school, or organize youth activities. And all of us listen, sing and pray.

Could one person do all these things? Could one person play the piano, preach the sermon, tell the children's story, make the coffee, look after babies, organize youth groups, visit sick people and do all the singing and praying? Of course not! But together many people can do all these things.

The hands cannot say to the nose, "I don't need you." And the mouth cannot say to the legs, "I don't need you." They all need each other. Together they are a body; by themselves they are incomplete. Together all of us are the body of Christ, and we all need each other.



HopeStory

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

MESSIAH

AN ORATORIO

PERFORMED BY **ENSEMBLE CANTATE ITERUM**



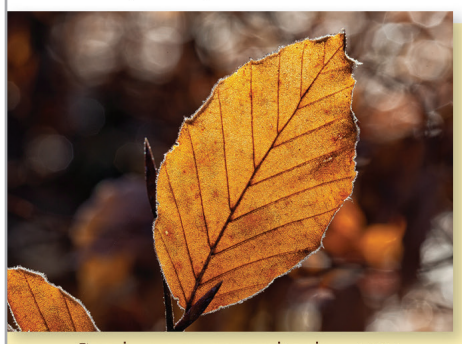
"AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD SHALL BE REVEALED"
ISAIAH 40:5

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2026 AT 7:00 PM

CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE

PURCHASE TICKETS AT HOPESTORY.CA/MESSIAH

Merritt Funeral Home Inc.



287 Station Street, Smithville, Ontario
905-957-7031
drew@merritt-fh.com
www.merritt-fh.com

M. Andrew Gauthier
Managing Funeral Director

Thomas C. Merrit
Funeral Director

Serving our community since 1921

ONTARIO FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION

50 Years of Stewardship
Firmly Planted, Faithfully Growing

SERVING FAITHFUL STEWARDS THROUGH PLANNED GIVING AND ESTATE PLANNING

1.800.267.8890 X 217
info@csservices.ca
WWW.CSSERVICES.CA

CHRISTIAN Stewardship SERVICES



chisel
STRATEGY FOR NONPROFITS, SCHOOLS, AND CHURCHES

Chris Bosch
chris@chiselconsulting.com
ww.chiselconsulting.com

Harry Houtman B.Ed. MA CFP

45 Harriet St Toronto M4L 2G1
harryhoutman2@gmail.com
(416) 461 1207 fax 416 465 6367

Over 30 years member of the Canadian Association of Gift Planners (CAGP) and 40 years of the Canadian Charitable Annuity Association (CCAA).

Looking to serve.

Hulse & English
Funeral Home
75 Church St. St. Catharines
905-684-6346 - 24 Hours

hulseandenglish.com
Holly Rousseau - Managing Director
Serving the community over 150 years

info@Dykstrabros.com
St Catharines > 905.646.0199
Beamsville > 905.563.7374
Burlington > 905.643.6978

DYKSTRA BROS. ROOFING

www.dykstrabros.com
DYKSTRA BROS ROOFING LTD, R.R.#1 BEAMSVILLE ON L0R 1B1

Serving the community since 1969

Jerry's AUTO BODY

Complete Collision Repairs!

5529 King St. West, Beamsville
905-563-7702 | jerrysautobody.ca

2024 BEST OF THE WEST

RAMAKER'S IMPORTS INC.

We specialize in
DUTCH FOOD / CHEESE /
CHOCOLATE / TEXTILES & GIFTS

579 Ontario St., St. Catharines ON L2N 4N8
Fax: 905-934-3344 **905-934-6454**

ramakersimports@bellnet.ca
ramakersimports.com

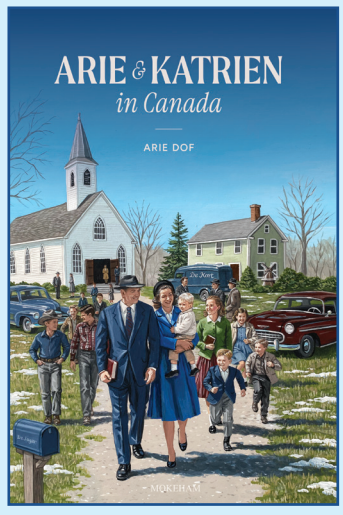
Contact Michelle at **ads@christiancourier.ca** to ask about our reasonable advertising rates.

JOBS

CO-PASTOR: FAITH FORMATION & DISCIPLESHIP

Immanuel CRC in Hamilton, Ont. is seeking a full-time Co-Pastor shaped by two primary pillars: Youth & Family Discipleship and Nurturing & Enabling Ministry Teams and Volunteers. Shared duties include biblical preaching rooted in Scripture and the reformed confessions, as well as relational pastoral care. View our church profile and job details at immanuelministries.ca or at network.crcna.org/jobs. Direct inquiries and applications to search@immanuelministries.ca.

IMMANUEL Christian Reformed Church together in FAITH



Arie & Katrien in Canada

Now available in English for the first time!

This book is a window into the world of Dutch immigrants to Canada in the 1950s, seen through the sharp and sensitive eyes of Rev. Anthony de Jager.

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

Order from our webstore at dutchthemedia.com
or send a cheque for $32.95
(includes taxes and shipping/handling) to:
Mokeham Publishing, PO Box 671, Cranbrook, BC V1C 4J2

Email publisher@mokeham.com for bulk and wholesale pricing

LOVED WITHOUT WORDS

Post-war immigrants may not have talked about loving their children, but they had many ways to show it.

Didy Prinzen

I RECENTLY read a negative remark about the parents of post-war immigrant children. It said that they never told their children "I love you"; that their children did not receive vocal expressions of love from them.

And yes, it's true that I don't remember my parents telling me that they loved me. Nevertheless, I was sure that they did love me. After reading that comment, I felt compelled to write about my childhood in Holland, to show that love does not always have to be expressed in words.

When I was a young girl, Mother would sit quietly knitting in the evenings. Father was always reading. My sister and I, after we had done the supper dishes, had to darn socks and stockings. We did not mind. We were watching the clock; at exactly eight o'clock we were allowed to quit and to read for a while before being sent to bed. Saturday evenings were special! No mending, but instead we would play games. And the highlight of the evening was when Mother put a newspaper on the table on which she dumped a pile of peanuts in their shells. What a feast that was!

How precious those evenings were! We felt safe and loved.

AT WORK AND PLAY

Our village had a psychiatric hospital in it. Because my dad took care of the gardens, that hospital played a big part in my life. I loved those grand, beautiful buildings and their biblical names – Bethesda, Ebenhaezer, Rehoboth, Salem, Hebron, Bethel and Zoar. We were allowed to wander the grounds because our dad worked there. The other village children were not. We felt privileged!

We played in the park and at the hospital's farm where Dad sometimes had to help out. And we were allowed to peek into the large kitchen where huge pots of food were being prepared. We played hide-and-seek between the bedsheets of the patients that hung to dry in long rows next to the kitchen when no one was looking. What fun that was! And in the fall we would gather the beautiful, shiny, reddish-brown chestnuts that had fallen from a large tree that stood in front of pavilion Hebron. These chestnuts were small treasures for us; we had few toys in those days.

We lived beside the "School with the Bible." At our house there was always the happy sound of children playing! Mother was always home when we came home from school. And Dad was home for all our meals. Dad prayed for a blessing and thanked the Lord for the meal and would also read a short scripture piece. Although Dad's mealtime prayers were mostly customary prayers, they were certainly not habitual. I always heard a deep reverence in Dad's voice when talking to the Lord. Today I still know those prayers by heart.

We had no radio, but we had an organ. We made our own music! Dad would play and we would sing. Dad also sang psalms around the house, and my sister and I often sang while doing dishes. When I was a child, singing was a big part of my life. It bonded us together as a family.

At an early age, we already had to do tasks around the house. Besides washing dishes and mending socks, we had to polish our Sunday shoes on Saturday. And another task I fondly remember doing was helping Dad sow beans in the garden. Dad would stick the spade in the ground, hold it sideways and I would drop three, sometimes accidentally four beans, in the hole. But that did not matter, Dad would say, as long as it did not happen too often. Dad would pull the spade up and the hole would close. I found it fascinating!

My dad had a great sense of humour and would sometimes pull pranks on us. Some mornings when he was shaving, he would unexpectedly give us a lick of the white suds on our face and we would scream!

FAMILY DAYS

Sundays were real family days. On Sunday afternoon in summer, after we had been to church a second time, our parents would take us for a walk in the country, along fields with waving, golden grain, red poppies and blue cornflowers. I still see the sights and sense the smell of those fields today. Or, on another Sunday, our parents might take us to the cemetery where my paternal grandparents lay buried. I never knew these grandparents, but Dad would tell us about them. I loved to read their names on the gravestones; my grandmother's name was Maria Vander Grijspaarde. I thought that was a beautiful name. My sister was named after her and my brother got my grandfather's name – Frederik. And I remember that I felt left out!



Didy (far left) and her siblings.

When I was in my early teens, I went to a young people's meeting every other week. We took turns writing an essay on a Bible story which would be read and discussed in the first part of the evening. After a short intermission, someone would present something lighter, like a poem or a short story. I still kept a few of those essays that I wrote seventy-five years ago!

I also went to catechism classes once a week, taught by our minister. We learned the questions and answers to the Heidelberg Catechism. The first question and its answer I still know by heart: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" A heavy question for a young girl, but the answer to it always was a comfort, and is especially a comfort to me now. "That I am not my own but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ."

REMEMBERING WITH GRATITUDE

My thoughts often go back to my childhood in Holland with thankfulness for my parents – for their guidance in life and in faith; for gratitude for my mother who was always home; for the many ways love was expressed by my parents in doing things together and giving us tasks to do, providing us with a sense of accomplishment and preparing us for life. Maybe this was not the case for all children at that time, but it was for me. Life was simple, and love flourished in our house. I did not need to hear my parents say "I love you" – I never doubted it!

Today it's another world. Most fathers and mothers are both working outside the home. Children are more often in daycare, in after-school programs and in sports. They do not spend as much time with their parents as we did. They spend much more time alone, often on electronic devices, which also keep them from experiencing the outside world and using their imagination.

So, perhaps children now need to hear "I love you" because the language of love in time and presence is not as common anymore.

I have to conclude that I am glad I was a child in the early previous century. And I am thankful that despite the lack of expression in words, I was loved and felt loved.



Didy Prinzen

Didy grew up in the 1930s and 40s in the Netherlands, and immigrated with her parents to Canada in 1950.



WE BUILT THIS!

2026 HAS BEEN A YEAR OF BUILDING FOR *CC*! Thanks to your generosity last year, we were able to start new programs and strengthen existing ones. In the spring, we launched *CC*'s inaugural News Correspondent cohort. Four young writers in Ontario, Isabelle Brown, Abby Ciona, Moriah Winsor and Alexis Jacklin, were selected to receive mentorship and training. By next spring, they will have learned what redemptive journalism means, how to do solutions journalism and what questions to ask when digging into a complex issue. Nine news stories have already been published in our pages thanks to this program (see page 1 for the latest from Abby Ciona).

We've also increased the involvement of our Photo Editor, Malik Dieleman, and have allocated more funding to art and photography thanks to Cal Seerveld's legacy gift to *CC* (see page 1 for a collage by Malik and page 12 for artwork commissioned from Noelle Bylsma, a Redeemer University student). If you notice higher-quality images and gorgeous Canadian art cropping up in our pages, that's all thanks to Malik and Maaike's teamwork. This summer we also welcomed Digital Editor Jennifer Boone, a King's University student, to guest edit two issues. Your generosity makes all of this mentorship possible. Thanks for building the next generation of Christian writers and creatives!

Join us in celebrating what we've built together by donating to our year-end campaign. As we turn our attention to what we hope to build in 2027, help us raise $25,000 by Dec. 31! All donations over $10 are fully tax-deductible.

WAYS TO DONATE:

Go to christiancourier.ca/donate
E-transfer admin@christiancourier.ca
Call Michelle at 1-800-275-9185
Mail a cheque to:
PO Box 124, Wainfleet, ON L0S 1V0

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN BUILDING?

IN THE SPIRIT OF OUR YEAR-END CAMPAIGN, we've asked you to send us your building stories. You can find more stories on pages 5 and 7.


Cathy Ypma

Cathy and Cye Ypma's pair of restored 1967 Mercury Cougars.

BARRIE CARS, WINNIPEG SNOWSTORM

When I met my now-husband Cye in 1969, he owned a 1967 red Mercury Cougar. Quite impressive! That was not a family car, so it was soon replaced. The love for that vehicle resurfaced in mid-life, so Cye searched online for a Cougar to restore. In 1999, he found one still on the road in Seattle, Washington, and arranged to have it transported by rail from Vancouver to Winnipeg. We lived in Thunder Bay at the time, so a trip to Winnipeg to retrieve a car was doable. Easter in April 1999 saw a rare snowstorm, the only snow that car ever experienced! Later that summer, someone mentioned that a 1967 Cougar was for sale in town. We bought it also, since it was similar in colour to a car I had owned many years before. It was a car we could drive, and one for Cye to refer to as he slowly worked on the restoration of his vehicle. It took 10 years and many hours of painstaking work to restore it, much of which Cye did himself, with additional help for the specialized work. Apparently, only 15 percent of people who start a car restoration project complete it. We first drove it on our 40th anniversary. Both cars were part of many car shows and special rides in the Barrie area, and allowed us to meet interesting people, including those with whom we could share our faith. Knowing the cars are continuing to give enjoyment to others makes all the hard work worthwhile.

Cathy Ypma
Barrie, Ont.

IF BARN WALLS COULD TALK

To call my 16 by 20-foot structure a "barn" is a stretch on both "barn" and "structure." After every windstorm, especially the frequent ones blowing from the northwest, I would walk to the barn thinking this would be the time I'd see boards and beams piled in a heap. But the barn was persistent. If those walls could talk, they would tell of those who lived here before me – the pigs raised, the horse that was tethered to the beam, the cow that provided a family with milk. I'd hear of the dog that was chained in the far-right corner. (Its halter and chain are still there.) A reliable friend told me that an old barn leaning to the left (or right) can be set upright again as long as it has not shifted off of its foundation. As a seasoned Bible reader and lifetime preacher, I heeded his advice as being inspirational. It has been a two-year project – inch by inch by means of chains, turnbuckles, the trees that surround the barn (which served as solid anchors), bolts and additional supports – but we have a happy barn again. I am very happy too. I am happy to see that a piece of the past lives on to show its beauty and tell its story. And I had a part in that rescue.

James Poelman
Morpeth, Ont.


Sid Van Der Meulen

Sid Van Der Meulen builds and sells birdhouses to raise money for World Renew. Last year he sold enough birdhouses to purchase 53 goats for farmers.


Maria Smedes

This lace tablecloth was made by hand by Allan Smedes.

A THOUSAND (PLUS) KNOTS

My husband, Allan Smedes, learned to tat years ago when he started nursing training in the Netherlands in a psychiatric department. Tatting is the art of making durable lace from a series of knots and loops. Fast forward to the late nineties – he picked it up again when I got into cross-stitching. When we moved into Evergreen in Grimsby, Ontario, he decided we needed a tablecloth for our new dining room setup. He finished it in 2007. It measures 155 centimetres point to point and took him one and a half years to complete. Over the years, he has created many items. Because doilies and such are no longer in fashion, he is now back to making snowflakes and bookmarks, which take roughly a day of concentrated work to finish.

Maria Smedes
Grimsby, Ont.


Barsin Aghajan and Laura Garbutt

A dress made from bread tags created by Marlene Bergsma, *CC* features editor, for the Niagara Artists' Centre's Strutt Wearable Art Show. "I had been saving the bread tags for years for my children's music teacher as a teaching aide for rhythm," writes Marlene. "When she retired, I had a surplus. I sorted the bread tags and made a dress. The underdress is clear plastic milk bags. Kinda risque!" Marlene says she has an entire family of builders and makers. "My six-year-old grandson makes and sells campfire starters from discarded egg cartons and candle wax and does such a booming business in downtown Toronto that his parents are starting to worry about their neighbours' pyromaniac tendencies."