

On a Mission

Essential News from Christian Reformed Home Missions

Christian Reformed Home Missions serves the churches, ministries, and members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America through partnerships that work to fulfill Christ's mission.

Finding Jesus at the Local Barbershop

For the past several years, Rev. Rik Stevenson had been getting his hair cut at an inner-city barbershop in Grand Rapids, Michigan. But Stevenson, pastor of *City Hope Ministries*, didn't simply use his time in the barber chair to get a wash and trim. Instead, he took the opportunity to witness to the young men hanging around the place.

"I felt the leading of the Lord to find another way to impact the community," says Stevenson. "The guys I met at the barbershop seemed very interested in what I do, so I thought it would be a good place to start a Bible study."

That's how *Urban Legends Bible Breakdown*, Stevenson's weekly barbershop Bible study, was born. Less than a year after its formation, the group now attracts up to fifteen peo-

"I see this as another way to expand the kingdom of God and minister outside the church walls."

ple to its Wednesday evening meetings. "The name refers to my goal of breaking down the Bible into simple language they can understand, as well as breaking down some myths about black urban culture," comments Stevenson, who has led *City Hope* for four years. "I'm an African-American with tattoos who rides a motorcycle, which the guys here are used to. They didn't even know I was a preacher until I told them. I think they're excited to see that God loves us all just how we are, motorcycles and all!"

City Hope is located in the Burton Heights neighborhood of Grand Rapids, an aging, poverty-stricken area that is plagued by crime and drugs. However Stevenson and his wife, Denise, have not given up on the area, which has a

Continued on page 2



Rev. Rik Stevenson, left, and his wife, Denise.



Local motorcycle enthusiasts ride to a recent service at City Hope.

800-266-2175 www.crh.m.org



Christian Reformed Home Missions

Following Christ. In Mission Together.

Black and Reformed Conference Looks at Belhar Confession

More than one hundred Christian Reformed pastors and a variety of other attendees gathered in Kalamazoo, Michigan, this spring to reflect on the themes of racial unity, justice, and reconciliation contained in the Belhar Confession.

Meeting at Heritage Christian Reformed Church, the participants came from all over the United States and Canada to attend this year's *Black and Reformed Conference*. The annual conference, sponsored by Home Missions, has a different focus every year.

"We are looking at the Belhar Confession this year and want to get feedback on this document," says Rev. Robert Price, leader of Home Missions' Black and Urban Ministry Team.

The hope, says Price, is to build a consensus among CRC congregations on the value of the Belhar Confession and then to ask Synod 2009 to adopt it as one of the denomination's formal creeds.

Originally written in Afrikaans and accepted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in South Africa, the Belhar Confession is named after a suburb of Cape Town, South Africa, where a general synod of the DRMC met in 1982.

Among other things, the confession underscores for Christians that racial reconciliation should be a hallmark of their faith. The document emerged out of the DRMC's fight to help end apartheid, the policy that used biblical teachings to separate the races in South African society.

The Belhar Confession states that Christians should reject any doctrine that sanctions "in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race or color."

The CRC has been asked by a group of Reformed churches in South Africa to consider making the Belhar Confession one of the church's formal creeds.

"We need to lock arms together and adopt a confession that will really move our church along."

"We believe that God has given us the Belhar as a gift that can help us use scriptural principals to address racism," says Rev. Al Mulder, a member of Home Missions' Great Lakes Ministry Team and one of the coordinators of the conference.

In an e-mail sent out to conference leaders before they met, Mulder wrote, "Your primary task is to help your group grasp the significance of what the Belhar says and to help them think creatively about how it instructs and challenges us—individually and as members of local congregations and the CRC denomination."

Mulder is also editor of *Learning to Count to One: The Joy and Pain of Becoming a Multiracial Church*.

As part of the recent conference, participants prayed and sang and worshipped together. They heard pre-

sentations on the history of racism in Reformed churches and talked about how best to communicate to their churches and denominational agencies and organizations the value of the Belhar Confession and why they think it should become a creed of the church.

"We need to lock arms together and adopt a confession that will really move our church along," remarks Victoria Proctor-Gibbs, a member of CRHM's Great Lakes Ministry Team and one of the coordinators of the conference.

But before a collective voice to push for adoption of the Belhar can be created, Proctor-Gibbs told conference participants that they needed to examine their own beliefs about racism. Only then, she says, "can we abandon the lies of the enemy and adopt a newness in Christ so that we can move a document out that can serve us and our church well."

Rev. Jerome Burton, pastor of Coit Community Church in Grand Rapids, adds that the conference was not only for blacks. Rather, it was put on by a group of black CRC pastors and others who are hoping in coming months to encourage everyone in the church "to look at what the Belhar Confession says about the issues of race and inclusiveness."

Meanwhile, the CRC's Interchurch Relations Committee is holding regional dialogue across the denomination to familiarize churches with the confession and its issues and to stimulate discussion toward its possible recommendation.

—Chris Meehan, *CRC Communications*

Continued from page 1

diverse mix of African-American, Hispanic, and other ethnic groups. "We are committed to bringing hope to this community," Stevenson says.

Although Stevenson hopes the men that come to *Urban Legends* each week decide to visit *City Hope*, he says he doesn't

expect them to. "I'm not trying to rush them into church," he remarks. "I see this as another way to expand the kingdom of God and minister outside the church walls. Most importantly, I'm able to spend time with a group of men who are becoming convicted in the Word of God."

Christian Reformed Students Discuss Their Faith with Campus Ministers

Once a month, University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) campus ministers Neil and Virginia Lettinga entertain about a dozen students at their home for lunch. In addition to breaking bread together, the group studies the Bible and shares about their experiences as students.

Sounds like a typical campus university get-together, right? It is, in many ways. But there's one critical difference: these students are all Christian Reformed, members of nearby Prince George CRC.

“Most of these students have been part of very tight-knit CRC communities their whole lives and have had very different experiences from those of the postmodern students they socialize with here.”

One may question the Lettingas' approach: isn't a campus ministry supposed to minister to post-modern seekers and non-believing students? Actually, says Virginia Lettinga, Christian Reformed students need this regular fellowship just as much as their non-believing counterparts at their 3,500-student university do. Lettinga observes, “These kids need to talk about what it means to be Reformed and how they are supposed to relate to non-believers on campus and in the world in general.”

During each monthly “Second Sunday” lunch at the Lettinga home, students discuss how to respond to the questions they receive from their secular peers at the university. “Most of these students have been part of very tight-knit CRC communities their whole lives and have had very different experiences from those of the postmodern students they socialize with here,” Lettinga adds.

The Christian Reformed Chaplaincy at UNBC, one of twenty-three North American campus ministries funded by Christian Reformed Home Missions, is the only full-time Christian ministry at the university. In addition to their duties ministering to students, the Lettingas report to the school's InterFaith Coordinating Committee, chaired by a member of the local Baha'i community. The pair also helps local pastors stay abreast of campus issues and offers a Reformed perspective among Christians on campus as they seek to encourage youth to meet Jesus.

In addition to their monthly lunches with CRC students, the Lettingas host Sunday lunch discussions for up to twenty-five other students, including seekers and Christians from other denominations.



CRC students gather for food and Bible study.



Campus pastor Neil Lettinga (serving pie) with CRC students.

Home Missions Plans New CRC Congregation for Michigan Prison

Christian Reformed Home Missions, working alongside several West Michigan CRCs, plans to launch a new church in a West Michigan prison later this year.

The new congregation, modeled after a Home Missions-supported prison ministry in South Dakota, likely will be based at either the Deerfield Correctional Facility or the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility, both located in Ionia, Michigan. The Home Missions Great Lakes Ministry Team, Classis Grand Rapids East, and Classis Thornapple Valley are partnering

on the project and are even looking at the possibility of starting worshipping communities in both prisons.

The formation team eventually hopes to get twelve partner churches to actively participate in worship services inside prison walls. Another goal is the creation of one or more trained mentoring teams that develop relationships with prisoners. These teams would continue to mentor a prisoner for up to a year following release.

Grand Rapids-based Church of the Servant has been identified as the calling church for the prison ministry, and La-Grave Avenue CRC, also in Grand Rapids, is committed to providing financial assistance and possibly church members to help lead worship services.

The new ministry will be similar to Home Missions-funded *Cornerstone Prison Church*, the congregation that meets in the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Worthing, South Dakota.

Brazil Natives Seek “Connection” in Wisconsin



Eneias Freitas (right), his wife Denise and their children.

You might not think of an empty suburban movie theater as an uplifting place to spend a Sunday morning. But if you happened upon the AMC Theater at Mayfair Mall in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, on the first Sunday of the month, you’d step into a full-on, roof-raising, multicultural celebration of Jesus.

It’s the monthly worship service of *Connection Point Church*, the new congregation started by Brazil natives Eneias

and Denise Freitas, with the help of Christian Reformed Home Missions. Their unique ministry combines worship, music, drama, and art in an effort to reach a growing audience of unchurched residents of this Milwaukee suburb.

Before coming to the United States in 1996, Eneias and Denise were actively involved in ministry in their hometown of San Paolo, Brazil. They were particularly called to the Milwaukee area because of the metropolitan area’s ethnic diversity,

which includes a sizable Brazilian population. “We are a place where people of all ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnicities are welcomed,” explains Eneias, “a space where artists are free to express themselves through drama, music, and dance.”

Above all, he adds, the goal of *Connection Point* is to transform the lives of those who have turned their backs

“We are a place where people of all ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnicities are welcomed.”

on Christ and the church. “My overall vision is to create a non-threatening environment where the unchurched and de-churched can connect with one another, with believers, and ultimately with Jesus Christ,” Eneias says. “We want to reach people for Christ, help grow people in Christ, and send people in the name of Christ.”

To support that vision, the church has numerous programs in addition to worship, such as a children’s ministry called *Connection Kids* led by Denise.

New Church Formed in Florida

Carlos Palacios left his native Peru after serving in the army during a dangerous and volatile time of terrorism and chaos. He dreamed of something better, but he wasn't sure what shape that dream would take.

Palacios' search led him through Columbia and Panama, to Belize and Mexico, and finally to the United States. Currently, he's in Grand Rapids, Michigan, taking his final on-campus class at Calvin Theological Seminary.

When he finishes, Palacios will return to Florida where, with the support of Christian Reformed Home Missions, he is trying to start a church in a mostly Latino section of the community of Kissimmee.

“Right now we're called Christ the Rock of Salvation Ministries because we believe so strongly that Christ is the root of this planting.”

“Right now we're called *Christ the Rock of Salvation Ministries* because we believe so strongly that Christ is the root of this planting,” Palacios explains. “But we also want to build a church that will grow into the center of the community.”

He says that he will help teach church members about the Reformed faith. He plans to focus on helping them learn how to “take the inside out into the community” and finding ways to bring the community into the church.

Palacios says his ministry team in Kissimmee has formed two study groups that meet separately—one Bible study and one group that focuses on evangelism and leadership.

Continued on page 6

Home Missions Director Eyes Retirement

Back in the late 1960s, Rev. John Rozeboom was considering a career that would likely have led him into the classroom to teach theology to would-be ministers.

But Rozeboom, who will retire as director of Home Missions this fall, set aside those plans after he got a taste of what it was like to help start a new church, almost from the ground up, in Riverside, California.

Serving with Home Missions, Rozeboom loved the challenge of getting to know people in Riverside, just outside of Los Angeles, and offering them a chance to learn more about the gospel of Christ.

An additional challenge came from the heady atmosphere of social change and renewal that the late 1960s brought. “It was terrific. Home Missions offered the possibility of being intentionally focused on your community. The work was pretty intense, but I loved it,” explains Rozeboom, one of four senior directors who are retiring from the CRC this year.

Rozeboom's legacy includes helping to start dozens of new churches and

campus ministries over the last forty years. Either as an on-ground mission worker or in administrative roles, he has worked to find innovative ways to spread the faith in urban, rural, and suburban settings.

Rozeboom says that in the past several years, Home Missions has “intentionally worked to start twenty-to-thirty new missional ministries every year, and half of them are multicultural. This doesn't happen just by hoping for it.”

While the story of Home Missions has been about new churches, established churches “are an extremely important part of that,” Rozeboom says. In many cases, new churches emerge out of a partnership between Home Missions and a local congregation. “We realize that if you want to revitalize a church, you plant a new church,” he notes.

The structure and focus of Home Missions has changed dramatically over the years, but the mission remains the same: “We want to have a personal/cultural impact on behalf of Jesus Christ in the community,” says Roze-



Rev. John Rozeboom

boom. “God's intent is to redeem the world and recreate and renew it in the name of Jesus Christ, and the church is an instrument of that mission.”

In retirement, Rozeboom plans to remain busy, writing, preaching, and helping in less formal ways to share the message of Home Missions. He describes his time with Home Missions this way: “Having been in a constant arena of change has made time fly by. No year was ever like the previous one.”

Canadian Ministry Opens Its Arms to Refugees



Refugees at a picnic hosted by The Journey.

Over the past few years, thousands of refugees have settled in the metropolitan area of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. They come to this region, located approximately sixty miles west of Toronto, hoping to find a new life free from the tyranny and tragedy they might have experienced in places like Myanmar, Sudan, and Afghanistan.

Rev. Adrian Van Giessen, Staff Team Leader at *The Journey*, a new Kitchener-Waterloo CRC, hopes they also find Jesus. That's why his congregation, started in 2005 with support from Christian Reformed

Home Missions, is deliberately reaching out to these newcomers to Ontario. "There are huge numbers of refugees coming here every year," Van Giessen explains. "From the day we opened our doors, we have strived to be a multicultural ministry. Working with refugees is definitely a part of that mission."

The Journey, which has 170 members, provides a range of ministries to new refugees and other immigrants, including mentoring services and a Wednesday evening English Language Conversation Circle. "The Conversation Circle is a key part of what we do," offers Van Giessen. "Every week we have up to a dozen refugees here at the church to practice their English skills with some of our members." The church also works closely with the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support, a local agency that provides support and services to Canadian refugees.

Church members also spend time working with refugee claimants, individuals who have declared themselves refugees but still must make their claims to

"Every week we have up to a dozen refugees here at the church to practice their English skills with some of our members."

the Immigration and Refugee Board to stay in Canada. Refugees, meanwhile, have already proven that they would face persecution, torture, or other poor treatment if they were to return to their home countries.

The Journey takes its ministry to refugees so seriously that it recently hired a part-time Intercultural Ministries Director, Solom Miranda. Miranda, who came to Kitchener-Waterloo from Brazil in July 2007 with his wife, Cassia, volunteers regularly at the Reception House, the first place more than thirty new refugees a week go. There and at *The Journey*, Miranda sits down with refugees, listens to their stories, and helps them with their transitions into Canadian life. "Solom plays a very important role in our ministry to refugees," Van Giessen says. "He is also helping to introduce people to Jesus and to our church."

Continued from page 5

But they join together once or twice each month for praise and worship. As soon as they have a third group in place, they'll start weekly worship services.

Shortly after coming to the United States and settling in New Jersey, Palacios saw a flyer from The New Horizon CRC in Clifton, New Jersey. The church was offering Bible study for Spanish-speaking neighbors.

Not only did he take the class, he soon began teaching English as a Second Language and leading small study groups in the church's Spanish outreach ministry. His wife, Trini, began teaching children's Bible classes as well. As the ministry grew, he felt God was calling him to become a pastor.

In order to do that, he recalls, he was led to a Home Missions online degree program offered through Calvin Seminary. Needless to say, he enrolled.

Meanwhile, last year Home Missions Hispanic and SE U.S. Team Leader Javier Torres called Palacios to tell him about a new ministry in Florida. It would be a big step, but after three months of prayer and discernment, he and his wife felt God was leading them to Florida.

In September 2007, Carlos became an intern at the Oasis Community Church in Winter Gardens, Florida, and began planting the church in Kissimmee, about an hour's drive away.

Palacios recalls, "Before I came to Florida I listened to the voices that said, 'be careful, this might not be the right move.' But I also heard, 'be faithful, maybe God has more for you.'"

—Susan Perry

Mosaic Church of Bellingham



Sean Hall, right.



Matt Atkins, left.

Mosaic Church is a new, growing faith community located in Bellingham, Washington. The following note is from Matt Atkins, who leads worship at the church along with music leader Sean Hall:

“It has been such a refreshing experience to be involved in such a compassionate, caring community that is so concerned for justice and mercy and living out love with action. We serve at the AIDS hospice, low income housing units, homeless shelters, a single mom’s nonprofit ministry, and in other local areas.

“Our main goal is to bring beauty to our neighbors here in Bellingham and live our common rhythms together. I can’t tell you what a blessing it has been for us spiritually! We have grown from a few friends in our backyard for BBQs to a few hundred people on a mission of love here in Bellingham. We are

Continued on back page

Home Missions Ministry Prayer Requests

Home Missions-funded ministries need your prayers! Please read the prayer requests listed below to find out some specific needs this summer.

Ministry: *The River, Allegan, Michigan*

Prayer request: We are in need of your help. Our facility has a leaky roof that needs to be re-shingled immediately before conditions worsen. We are unable to cover all of the expenses. Join us in praying for a solution.

Ministry: *River’s Edge Church, El Paso, Texas*

Prayer request: Please ask God to be with our church leaders as they try to assemble a core team. Pray also that God will bless the local community, that their hearts will be open to the Holy Spirit’s calling.

Ministry: *New Heart CRC, Longwood, Florida*

Prayer request: Our church seeks to make itself a place where “every member is a minister.” Please pray that the new families who have been coming on a regular basis will join our church and help us realize this core belief.

Ministry: *Crosswinds Community Church, Holland, Michigan*

Prayer request: At a recent Sunday worship service, a large number of worshippers were non-majority ethnic people. Pray that God continues to bring a multicultural element into our young church.

Ministry: *New City Church, Jersey City, New Jersey*

Prayer request: Several young people at our church have recently made public commitments to Christ. Pray that they will understand the importance of Scripture, church, and prayer, and that they will stand up to the attacks and doubts they might face.

Ministry: *North Shore Chapel, Danvers, Massachusetts*

Prayer request: We recently moved into a new church building after worshipping in a movie theatre for five years. Please pray that the Lord blesses our ministry in the new location and that we will attract many new believers.

Ministry: *Zuni Christian Mission School, Zuni, New Mexico*

Prayer request: We are in need of financial assistance. Despite stable contribution of parents toward the cost of education and increased contributions from donors, we have not been able to meet operational costs. Please pray that we can find a way to change this situation.

Ministry: *LOGOS Campus Ministry, York University, Toronto, Ontario*

Prayer request: Pray for Katherine Hennig and Joanna Nefs, next year’s new Emerging Student Leaders for the student club, Leadership, Culture, & Christianity. Pray that they will grow in faith and wisdom as they serve and lead.

Ministry: *Monroe Community Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Prayer request: Pray for opportunities in our neighborhood, that God will give us wisdom and discernment as we determine the best way to minister to the people we’ve connected with.

Ministry: *Northwest Hispanic Ministry, Mt. Vernon, Washington*

Prayer request: God is actively working through and among us. It is a great joy to serve our God and to serve his church. Please keep our ministry in your prayers.



Honoring Lives and Legacies through Gifts to Home Missions

Memorial donations to Christian Reformed Home Missions through June 17, 2008. Those memorialized or honored are listed in bold, with respective donors indicated below each name.

In Memorium:

In Memory of Lorraine Apol
Henry W. Apol

In Memory of Jacob and Anna Baas
Shirley M. Baas

In Memory of Hattie Bode
Catherine J. Butterfield

In Memory of Marge Boelkuis
Alvin L. and Elaine J. Berkompas

In Memory of Anne DeMann
Wilma Modderman

In Memory of Richard and Dora Dykstra
Richard and Marion Dykstra

In Memory of Alice Feddes Huttinga
Marvin and Nell Feddes

In Memory of Ben Johnson
Alice J. Jansen

In Memory of Alida Klein
Lloyd R. and Emma Kredit

In Memory of Rev. John Morren
David and Cynthia Brown
Jack A. and Mary A. De Graaf
Baldwin L. and Thelma M. De Korne

Lucy M. Folkema
Gerry Nederhood
Dorothy Moffat

Rev. Jochem and Marlene A. Vugteveen
Gerard I. and Beverly L. Winkle

In Memory of Betty Oostendorp
Bertha Triezenberg

In Memory of Rev. Raymond Opperwall
Baldwin L. and Thelma M. De Korne
Henry J. and Faith M. Lane
Leona G. Oppewal

In Memory of Dr. and Mrs. Raymond Peterson
H. George and Elizabeth M. Hekman

What Legacy Will You Leave?

We all desire significance. And for many of us, there is a compelling need to make a difference—to leave a lasting impact on the people most dear to us and on the world in which we live. The search for significance and a desire to plan for the future leads many to ponder our legacy.

What kind of legacy will you leave? A bequest is perhaps the easiest and most tangible way to have a lasting impact on the people and organizations that mean the most to you. And a bequest may be an effective way to both make a gift and lessen the tax burden on your family and on your estate.

Marty and Linda had been volunteers with Home Missions for many years. The ministry of Home Missions was very important to them. They had already been making current

gifts, but they wanted to do more. They learned that they could help by making a bequest, so their attorney revised their will to include a provision gifting a percentage of their estate to Home Missions.

Marty and Linda liked that the bequest was easy to do, they could continue to use their assets during their lifetime, and their estate would be permitted a charitable deduction for the gift at their death. Best of all, their bequest would help achieve their goals by furthering Home Mission's mission far into the future.

For a FREE copy of "Is it time to update your estate plan?" simply contact Home Missions at advancement@crcna.org or 800-266-2175.

Continued from page 7

located in a town where many people are unchurched, so rethinking and reshaping how we live out our mission of Christ's love is paramount here.

"We are very excited at how simple love in service of the needy speaks volumes where words fall flat. Thanks for your generous support of this Kingdom endeavor!"

—Matt Atkins