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Back to God Ministries International

The search team for a new director of Back to God Ministries International was blessed with applications and inquiries from a diverse group of candidates. The BTGMI Board anticipates submitting the name of a candidate to Synod 2012 for approval.

Meanwhile media ministry continues to move forward, with increased opportunities for sharing the Gospel worldwide.

Chinese ministry team is following up contacts made in mainland China, strengthening the potential for media reach and resource distribution. Please continue to pray for Rev. Jimmy Lin, Chinese ministry leader, who is also serving as BTGMI interim director.

French ministry leader Rev. Paul Mpindi led a youth rally in Central African Republic. He reported, “About a thousand young adults came and filled to overflowing the room where the teaching took place. It was wonderful to see the Spirit of God move." Our French outreach in Haiti in collaboration with World Missions continues to provide follow-up and encouragement to those still struggling after the 2010 earthquake.

As conflict continues in the Middle East, please keep our Arabic staff and audience in your prayers. "We are encouraged by the flow of new SMS text and email messages and the large number of visits by young Muslims to our Arabic ministry website," reports BTGMI’s Arabic ministry leader. Through secure messaging, the Arabic staff is able to provide discipleship resources and guidance for all those who respond.

A new joint ministry with Words of Hope (WOH) in Indonesia will help bring needed resources for expanded broadcast capabilities to serve listener communities in remote regions. WOH’s experience with broadcast in local languages will strengthen BTGMI listener communities in remote areas.

World Missions

Karen Chavez, 35, is a recent graduate from the Evangelical University of the Americas (UNELA) in Costa Rica. She’s received training from several Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) missionaries, even receiving one-on-one mentorship from a retired missionary, Cecilia Drenth. Karen is a solid Christian, a strong student, and a gifted communicator. Now she’s using those gifts as a new professor at her alma mater, UNELA.

Christian Reformed World Missions has been helping to train Christian leaders through UNELA for over 25 years. Begun by CRWM as a missiological institute, UNELA is now a high level university led by Costa Ricans.

UNELA draws students from across Latin America, training them to become pastors, church leaders, missionaries, teachers, and counselors in Costa Rica and beyond. As students learn more about the biblical worldview, they’re excitedly seeing how they can serve God through whatever they do.

CRWM is reaching teachers and students across the globe with a biblical worldview. Through partnerships with organizations like UNELA, CRWM is helping people and churches embrace their role in extending Christ’s reign among the nations.

Home Missions
I am often asked, “What exactly does Home Missions do as an agency of the Christian Reformed Church?” There are many answers, but a recent three-day visit to Eastern Ontario provides valuable insights.

The visit started with Adrian Van Giessen, one of seven Home Missions Regional Leaders. Adrian is responsible for all of eastern Canada and connects with 120+ CRC congregations through seven classes.

I also met the leadership team of The Journey, a Home Missions-supported local church plant. Pastor Andrew Zantiing and his team – all bi-vocational – shared powerful testimonies of how new believers are coming to know the Lord.

The next day, Adrian and I met with local pastors involved with area Home Missions-sponsored clusters. Again, I heard the passion of local ministry leaders who desire to see the Gospel proclaimed effectively.

That evening, I traveled to Newmarket, where I spoke to a group of people at Bethel CRC. Together, we asked questions about what it means for an established congregation to be a missional outreach church. The discussion was robust as new ideas were introduced and participants began to imagine growth in a whole new light.

The next morning, we joined Jamie Vander Berg and Jen McIntyre, campus pastors at a Home Missions-supported campus ministry at the University of Guelph. Jamie and Jen were quick to articulate how their ministry was started and is being sustained through gracious support from classis, local churches, and a Home Missions grant.

God is leading a powerful, life-transforming Gospel movement in North America, and Home Missions is empowered with a unique role to serve and lead in so many areas. What an amazing blessing!

- Rev. Moses Chung, Director
  Christian Reformed Home Missions

CRWRC – Christian Reformed World Relief Committee

Name change update

In February, CRWRC’s bi-national Executive Board unanimously approved changing the organization’s name to “World Renew.” The tagline, “Living Justice • Loving Mercy • Serving Christ,” was also approved.

The recommendation was presented to the CRCNA Board of Trustees, which deferred a decision until May. In the meantime, the new name will be presented to the full CRWRC Board of Delegates for approval. It will then go back to the CRCNA Board of Trustees.

The new name will be presented to Synod 2012 for affirmation.

To learn more about CRWRC’s name change visit www.crwrc.org/name.

West Africa drought response

Millions of lives are threatened because of failed harvests and lack of rain across western Africa. The need for food is urgent. Niger is one of the worst-hit countries, enduring severe droughts in 2005, 2010 and again this year.

CRWRC is helping 1,200 households in southwest Niger with subsidized grain and food-for-work activities until the start of the rainy season in June. Additional initiatives may include improved seeds, insect control, goat distribution, livestock feed, and fodder crops.

For news about International Disaster Response visit, www.crwrc.org and choose International Relief from the Project Menu.

Embrace AIDS Sunday

CRWRC is working around the world to respond to the need for HIV and AIDS prevention, care, and education. Your continued support to help stop and reverse AIDS is greatly needed. You can help through CRWRC’s Embrace AIDS Sunday on June 3, 2012. For AIDS resources and more information, visit www.crwrc.org/embraceaids

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

Our chaplaincy core continues at an all-time high of just over 120. During the last quarter, we have begun conversations or applications with eight individuals interested in chaplaincy. In the same 90 days we interviewed four individuals for endorsement and completed the endorsement of two new chaplains.

It is not unrealistic to project that we may soon reach our goal of endorsing eight new chaplains per year. Since we have seen an average of five retirements each year in the last decade, this could create a healthy growth (25%) over the next decade.

We have several military chaplains deployed overseas. One Special Forces chaplain began his second deployment in Afghanistan in January. Another life-long military chaplain (now one of our six serving as Colonel or equivalent) will retire in May.

Another civilian chaplain began serving this year on the board of a national chaplaincy training and credentialing organization (ACPE - Association for Clinical Pastoral Education).

We are working on plans for the first concurrent annual chaplain conference with our counterparts in the Reformed Church in America counterparts. We will meet simultaneously at the Prince Center, Calvin College, and will be together for several meals and activities during the two and a half days.

Our chaplains continue to serve well and are well respected in their various institutions. Many serve as directors and/or trainers of other chaplains. All carry the love of Christ into areas where the church would otherwise have little or no access. May their tribe continue to increase!
Disability Concerns
This year marks Disability Concerns’ 30th birthday. We began in 1982 with a newsletter and part-time coordinator. Three years later, our denomination made a commitment to include people with disabilities fully in all aspects of congregational life. This resolution remains our commitment today:

Whereas the Bible calls us to be a caring community as the covenant people of God,

Whereas we recognize that our Lord Jesus Christ requires the involvement of all his people in the ministry of his church,

Whereas we have not always made it possible for people with disabilities to participate fully in the community and have often isolated them and their families,

We pledge ourselves to be the caring community according to I Corinthians 12, paying special attention to the needs and gifts of people with physical, sensory, mental, and emotional impairments.

We pledge ourselves to make public these needs and capabilities through our various communication and educational materials.

We pledge ourselves to overcome three barriers:

- the attitudinal barriers which make persons with disabilities feel unwelcome;
- the communication barriers in sight, sound, and understanding which may impede participation; and
- the physical and architectural barriers which make it difficult for persons with some disabilities to enter.

We commend those within the denomination who have made efforts to eliminate these barriers in order to use the gifts of all people in our life together as God’s family.

Faith Alive Christian Resources
The Banner continues to focus on expanding its website and web content, while maintaining high standards for its print edition. We welcome onboard our new associate editor, Judy Hardy, who will be the public face of The Banner at the denominational office in Grand Rapids. Judy is a highly experienced editor who joins us from the Faith Alive editorial team.

Marketing Communications
Spring and early summer marketing promotions are focused on Sunday school curriculum and the upcoming new hymnal, Lift Up Your Hearts, which will release in June 2013.

Messaging to churches will focus on three key benefits of Faith Alive’s curriculum line:

1. Reformed: Our curriculum views the Bible not as a collection of stories but as one story—the story of how God redeems and restores the world through Jesus.


3. Connect Hearts & Minds: Faith Alive knows every student is unique. We give teachers the tools to inspire all kinds of learners with creative activities that truly teach the heart and mind.

Even though Lift Up Your Hearts won’t release for another year, it’s not too early to get sampling and order information out to churches. Replacing hymnals is an important decision with larger-than-normal financial implications to a church’s budget.

The pre-release campaign for Faith Alive’s new hymnal will be underway in May. Faith Alive will be offering discounts to churches who pre-order Lift Up Your Hearts. While a pre-order is required to receive the discount, payment is not required until after the hymnal releases in June 2013.

Loan Fund
The CRC Loan Fund has money to lend!

The Loan Fund currently finds itself in an all-time high cash position. This means that we have the resources available to assist U.S. churches in financing real estate projects, which includes the purchase, construction, expansion and repair of church buildings and parsonages.

We will also refinance existing mortgage loans owed to banks and other creditors which may be at unfavorable interest rate or terms.

Our strong liquidity position is primarily the result of the continued support of our church members who faithfully invest in the Loan Fund, along with a significant decline in the demand for loans due to the economy.

The Loan Fund is anxious to fulfill its mandate of making loans to financially sound, organized CRC churches to help them complete their projects. Our interest rates, terms and fees compare very well to what lenders are offering in most parts of the country.

If your church or one that you are aware of has been putting off a project to expand or improve its facilities, please consider the Loan Fund. We have the knowledge, expertise and, thankfully, the financial capacity to handle your needs.
Pastor-Church Relations

Specialized Transitional Ministers (STMs) provide leadership to congregations through times of significant transition. The cadre endorsed by the Office of Pastor-Church Relations continues to grow and find places to serve.

This summer, Rev. Les Kuiper will be leaving First CRC of Oostburg, Wisconsin, to serve for the first time as an STM with Drayton CRC in Drayton, Ontario, Canada.

And also this summer, Rev. Tom Pettinga will be leaving Cedar CRC in Cedar, Iowa to serve for the first time as an STM with First CRC of Oostburg, Wisconsin. First CRC desired to have an STM because they will be transitioning to a new pastor after Rev. Kuiper’s service there of 24 years.

There are many and varied reasons why congregations choose to seek the services of a Specialized Transitional Minister. Whether following a long pastorate or a difficult season of ministry or some other significant dynamic more and more congregations are recognizing the value of having an STM for a year of two before issuing a call to a longer tenured pastor.

Safe Church Ministry

Safe Church Ministry provides leadership to the CRC to help churches become aware of the dynamics of abuse, to reduce risk and prevent abuse, and to respond justly, effectively, and compassionately where abuse has occurred.

New Youth Curriculum – Driver’s Training for Dating is available on our website for churches to help teens navigate the winding and treacherous road of dating relationships.

Webinar – The What, Why, and How of Safe Church Ministry was successfully presented on Feb. 29. It remains as a resource on the Network, giving an overview of Safe Church Ministry.

Safe Church Ministry Conference April 27-28 – The first conference designed for ALL Safe Church Team members will include presenters from several organizations to equip and motivate our Safe Church Teams. So far, more than 40 plan to attend. Some of the sessions will be recorded for future use.

New Safe Church Guide for the Network – We welcome Rachel Boehm, who brings excellent skills to her oversight of Safe Church on the Network.

Safe Church Communications – Communications have increased between the office and Safe Church Team Members with a monthly newsletter and an updated Google group.

Prayer – Safe Church Ministry now has a team of people who are committed to pray regularly for the ministry using monthly email updates (which maintain confidentiality). Our fight is not against flesh and blood…

Response to requests for assistance – In the first two months of 2012, over 140 interactions with churches and individuals were recorded by the office of Safe Church Ministry. Requests vary from easy questions related to safe church, to help in responding to extremely difficult and complicated situations.

Race Relations

The Office of Race Relations has existed for over 40 years and during that time has accomplished much.

As we move forward into 2012, we still have much to accomplish. In March, a group of race relations stakeholders—those who have been engaged in the work of race relations—met in Chicago to envision together the continued pursuit of a unified, diverse, and reconciled church. We began with worship and prayer. Then we focused on leadership qualities as evidenced in best practices. Finally, we planned strategically for the near future.

In April, we will be involved in a number of events, including attending the Facing History and Ourselves Conference in Chicago; facilitating a Dance of Racial Reconciliation workshop in Holland, Mich., meeting with other stakeholders of our immigration reform initiative, Church Between Borders, and attending the Black and Reformed Conference at Coit Community CRC.

We invest time in those types of events because we value relationships and because our goal is to help recognize, expose, and dismantle racism. . . .

In May, we have the joy of collaborating with a Calvin College professor to train a diverse group of people to facilitate Cultural Intelligence Building workshops, which focus on “concrete skills to improve our ability to act and react in positive ways across cultural lines.”

There are four concrete skill areas in cultural intelligence: knowledge, drive, strategy, and action. Through a carefully tailored set of interactive activities, participants will become aware of their own life-long journey in cultural intelligence as they build their own capacity to improve their cultural intelligence.

We continue to rejoice in the progress of our work as we see the movement of God and his great power. To God be the glory forever and ever.
Sustaining Congregational Excellence

Just over a year ago, the first planning meeting was held for the 2012 Pastors’ Spouses’ Conference—Journey of Joy. As you read this article, the planning team is still hard at work getting all the details in place for the November event taking place in Miami, Florida.

Approximately 100 pastors’ spouses will spend 48 hours engaging in a variety of activities including plenary sessions, workshops, worship, and times of fellowship. The keynote speakers will be Jerry and Renee Ritskes. In their work with Focus on the Family, the Ritskes direct retreats for pastors and their spouses. This, in addition to years of ministry, makes them well suited to speak to pastors’ spouses.

The workshops offered include: Fitness, Spiritual Disciplines, and Depression in the Christian Life, Painting, Worship Jam Session, and more. The goal is to provide a number of unique choices so there is something for everyone.

The conference is a wonderful opportunity for pastors’ spouses to gather with others who “get it”. Those who understand the blessings and challenges that comes with being a pastor’s spouse. One spouse who attended the 2010 conference said: “What a great time to connect with these women—to share struggles and joys in ministry. There is no other place like this.”

If you have an opportunity, encourage your pastor’s spouse to consider attending the conference. (Brochures were mailed out the beginning of May.) For more information go to http://www.crcna.org/pages/spe_spouses_conference.cfm

Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue

In January 2012, we asked CRC and RCA congregations in Canada to be in prayer for the historic Crown – First Nations Gathering (held on Jan. 24). That event underscored the profound significance of renewed relationships between First Nations and non-indigenous people in Canada.

The Centre for Public Dialogue has an ongoing program of research and advocacy on reconciliation in education and celebrates the momentum experienced already in the early part of this year.

In the coming months we will be working with Indigenous and Parliamentary leaders to encourage the implementation of: the good commitments made in the House of Commons’ Shannen’s Dream motion (for equitable and culturally appropriate education for all students in Canada); and the excellent recommendations for Reconciliation in education made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education.

We hope that these visions and plans for education reform represent real momentum for reconciliation. Please join us in continuing prayer for justice and reconciliation in Indigenous Education.

The Centre for Public Dialogue is also in the process of developing a program on Migrants and Refugees (in partial response to a recommendation from Synod). At this early stage of work on this important topic we are consulting with CRWRC, other CRC partners, and the major refugee support and policy organizations.

We invite churches and classes to let us know about their perspectives and experiences of providing support and seeking justice for refugees and migrants. Knowing your experiences will help us develop a well grounded approach.

Please contact the Centre for Public Dialogue with your ideas and questions: 613.686.6298 publicdialogue@crcna.ca www.crcna.ca/publicdialogue

Calvin College

The Calvin College Board of Trustees met in February, interviewing 21 faculty members for reappointment; including eight approved for tenure, and 13 for first reappointment.

All faculties undergo an appointment interview in the third year of employment and again three or four years later, if they have met the requirements for a tenure appointment.

The testament of faith by Calvin faculty in Board interviews is one of the most exciting and energizing endeavors for College trustees.

The CRCNA Board of Trustees met Feb. 23-24 in Burlington, Ontario, and interviewed Dr. Michael Le Roy, to be the ninth president of Calvin College. The vote was unanimous in support of the appointment.

Dr. Le Roy will be interviewed and the appointment voted on by the Synod 2012 as a final step before taking the helm as president on July 1, 2012.

In these final months of Dr. Gaylen Byker’s 17-year tenure as Calvin president, the college is hosting several events to honor Gaylen and Susan Byker. We gratefully acknowledge their gifts of hospitality, hosting literally thousands at their home over the years.

We thank God for Gaylen’s tireless work in enhancing Calvin’s physical spaces and footprint, global reach, welcoming students, strong emphasis on teaching and research, commitment to raising and endowing scholarships to make college affordable, and “staying the course” for Calvin to be guided by Reformed identity and mission.

We covet your prayers and thank you for your support during this transition for both the Byker and Le Roy families. We are blessed in the knowledge that each Calvin president since 1919: John Hiemenga, Johannes Broene, R. B. Kuiper, Ralph Stob, Henry Schultze, William Spoelhof, Anthony Diekema, Gaylen Byker, and now, Dr. Michael Le Roy, have been called to Calvin College “for such a time as this.”

See www.calvin.edu.
Calvin Theological Seminary

On Feb. 29, 2012, Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) received the welcome news from our accrediting body, the Association for Theological Schools, that our distance education proposal (five year, hybrid Master of Divinity degree) has been granted approval.

We are grateful for this significant step in the journey. We can also report that our first admitted student to this program comes to us from Canada.

The distance education program will help expand our capacity to serve students where they live and work. You can learn more about this ministry opportunity by going to www.calvinseminary.edu/distance

Rev. Richard Sytsma - Last Lecture

Soon to be retiring Dean of Students/International Student Advisor, Rev. Richard Sytsma, will be presenting a “Last Lecture” as he highlights what he has learned while at CTS. This open-to-the-community lecture is scheduled for Tuesday, May 1, at 4:00 pm in the DeVos Auditorium at CTS.

We give thanks that Rev. Richard Sytsma will continue to serve by leading the International Student Orientation at CTS.

Faculty Books

Two recent publications have been produced by CTS faculty.

Dr. Dean Deppe, Professor of New Testament, has written All Roads Lead to the Text: Eight Methods of Inquiry into the Bible (Eerdmans) and Dr. Michael Williams, Professor of Old Testament, has written How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens: A Guide to Christ-Focused Reading of Scripture (Zondervan).

We are thankful for the publication of these two new books that seek to serve the Church. Both faculty members are available for adult education presentations of this material.

Partners Worldwide

During the past year, Partners Worldwide empowered thousands of business people and entrepreneurs around the world to overcome poverty with sustainable solutions.

As people fulfill their unique calling in Christ’s transformation, and this movement of business people gains momentum, the Christian Reformed Church is making a lasting impact in people’s lives through the support of Partners Worldwide.

Business affiliates of Partners Worldwide mentor and encourage business people across the globe. This year, more than 400 dedicated mentors offered over 11,400 hours as they walked alongside others in long-term partnerships.

These businesses have been able to maintain 25,062 jobs and created 1,638 more jobs, directly impacting the lives of 133,500 people with a sustainable job and steady income.

One business owner in Haiti points to the book of Ruth where “owners are instructed not to work their whole field but to leave the edges for the poor to work; yet, many people these days tend to work the whole field, bag the excess, and then hand out the bags to the poor.”

She says her calling to business is essential in long-term solutions to poverty. “To me, providing employment is the most obvious and effective way a Christian can care for the poor.”

Thank you for partnering in this vital ministry of Partners Worldwide. We ask you to continue affirming and commissioning business people as members of the Body of Christ.

We look forward to partnering with more CRC churches to continue creating jobs and transforming lives.

Dynamic Youth Ministries

GEMS Girls’ Clubs

Highlights of last quarter include shaping our new urban ministry initiative as we seek to reach girls in more and more areas. Also:


A significant expansion in the number of readers for both of our magazines for girls – SHINE brightly and Sparkle, due to increased marketing efforts.

The ongoing expansion of our work in Zambia. Preparations to open the school in September are underway and some 100 women were trained to be effective counselors.

Calvinist Cadet Corps

The Cadet Congress has decided that it might be okay for the Calvinist Cadet Corps to consider a name change. But congress doesn’t have the authority to change the constitution to allow for a name change, so that proposal has gone out to all counselors for a vote. It must pass by a two-thirds majority. Some say that a name change will allow for greater outreach into the communities of our churches. Please join us in praying that the way the vote will go in whichever way will bring God the most glory.

Another mandate from Congress involves establishing a task force to develop a Web system for Cadets.

Youth Unlimited

Teams of adults from many of the 28 planning teams of Youth Unlimited’s 2012 faith forming experiences were present along with the YU staff and board of directors for the Leadership Summit, March 2-4 at Calvin College. This was a weekend filled with training, networking, vision casting, relationship building and worshipping God in preparation for ministry with youth.

Youth Unlimited covets your prayers on behalf of the nearly 200 churches sending students, the planning teams working hard to create a life impacting experience, the parents who entrust YU’s help in their child’s spiritual development and the youth who will encounter Jesus Christ.