SPRING 2014

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Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

Much of our activity in the past few months has been around three things:

1) Continuing to process a growing number of inquiries and applications for endorsement. We recently formulated a chart to help keep track of all the individuals who are in the process of preparing for chaplaincy and were surprised that the list extended to over 40 names. We expect that a number of these will obtain full or provisional endorsements in the coming year.

2) Attending and registering to attend a series of endorser conferences that tend to cluster in the first half of each year. Four of these conferences met in January. Since two of the four relate primarily to military chaplaincy, this happens each year in Alexandria, Virginia, not far from the Pentagon. This makes it convenient for the three Chiefs of Chaplains and some of their staff to meet with us and brief us about their concerns and initiatives. Two other conferences in the next few months will take place in Virginia and California and will be combined with visits to chaplains in those areas.

3) Preparing for our annual conference at the end of May. Our keynote speaker will be prominent oncologist Dr. Stephen Iacoboni who has written a book, *The Undying Soul*, based on his observations of how people face the reality of their own deaths. We will meet in conjunction with the Reformed Church in America chaplains so that we can share the input of this speaker and some of our discussion sessions. We are also using for the first time an on line registration service to simplify the process of collecting information, exchanging funds, arranging transportation, meals, rooms, etc. This is our single largest expenditure of funds and time each year with over 100 individuals attending at a cost of about $30,000. It is the only time that many of these chaplains see each other and receive professional, social, and denominational recharging. We covet your prayers for this event that will occur May 29-31 at the Prince Conference Center in Grand Rapids.

Disability Concerns

Working in close collaboration with the Disability Concerns office of the Reformed Church in America, our offices help CRC and RCA churches to think about and put into practice both justice and care.

• **Justice**: People with disabilities face stereotyping and prejudice, even in the church. Often this prejudice arises out of ignorance or pity and it frequently leads to leaving people with disabilities at the margins of church life, feeling misunderstood and hurt. Our tagline expresses two essential aspects of justice: "Everybody belongs, everybody serves."

• **Care**: Disabilities can include physical, hearing, visual, and intellectual impairments as well as mental illnesses. As a person and family deal with a newly acquired disability, they deal with grief and all the emotions that come with it. Others may have adjusted well but still need additional support. True caring comes alongside people, walks with them through the years, and affirms their importance, even when society writes them off. We hope and pray that our newest collaboration with Diaconal Ministries Canada will help build new avenues for caring within congregations.

We help churches to practice justice and care through an extensive network of regional and church disability
advocates, conferences, consultations, collaborations, and printed and electronic communications.

One of our biggest challenges is helping people in churches to understand that making a building accessible is the beginning, not the end, of doing justice and loving mercy for the people who have disabilities in their congregation and community.

**Office of Social Justice**

The Office of Social Justice (OSJ) continues its educational and advocacy work in many areas:

Immigration continues to be a priority. The OSJ received a grant from the Evangelical Immigration Table to hire a field worker to organize faith communities in West Michigan. Some highlights of that work include 10 pastors attending a fly-in to advocate for reform in Washington, DC; two community prayer vigils; two roundtable gatherings of faith, business, and law enforcement leaders; several op-eds and letters to the editor; and multiple educational events for pastors and congregations. We pray the U.S. will soon have meaningful and just immigration reform.

Important bi-national (Canada-U.S.) collaboration is around indigenous justice. Our communications team has prepared a video to educate churches about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the importance of reconciliation with indigenous peoples. The CRC’s Doctrine of Discovery Task Force is working to unravel the religious logic underpinning the dehumanization and dispossession of indigenous peoples, with support from OSJ and Centre for Public Dialogue staff.

In collaboration with Christian Reformed World Missions and World Renew, the OSJ has launched a three-year pilot project entitled LEAP (Linked Engagement Action Programs). LEAP aims to enhance the reach of all three agencies as they engage young people to become responsible, global citizens who are deeply invested in the life of the church.

Each December, for the season of Advent, the OSJ and World Renew provide daily reflections for CRC members. This year’s theme was “Strangers in the land.” The reflections focused on Jesus’s journey as both stranger and host and how that influences the way we work for justice. The advent devotions continue to be a growing success, reaching over 2,000 people.

OSJ staff are currently working to convene members of the CRC community who are passionate about creation care and/or whose work intersects with environmental stewardship to a stakeholders meeting in Grand Rapids March 21-22, 2014. The purpose will be to plan and implement concrete projects around the creation stewardship recommendations from Synod 2012.

**Pastor-Church Relations**

We continue to meet with congregations and their leaders for support in times of transition and discernment. Our mandate is to support pastors, staff, councils, and congregations in two areas: intervention and education. We see ministry happening in both areas.

PCR recently worked with Classis Holland to provide a church visitors training session. It provided an opportunity to learn some effective ways to engage healthy conversation with council and pastors and pastors’ spouses by asking good questions, listening well and initiating follow up, if necessary. Participants shared best practices and gave encouragement, particularly to new church visitors. An additional component in basic coaching was led by a Home Missions staff. Creating a place for honest, open discussions, and the value of church visits in congregational care and renewal were emphasized. Because there is a critical need for better congregational engagement on this level, classes are looking at church visiting in new, refreshing ways.

PCR continues to work with churches experiencing conflict and facing other difficult challenges to bring resolution and/or restoration. As we look to God for help and wisdom in each situation, we remain hopeful and confident; even in times of conflict and uncertainty there is growth.

Our Ministerial Information Service, along with a volunteer committee, assists search committees of congregations looking for pastors and pastors looking for a new position. We encourage networking and reviewing advertisements in The Banner. We continue to see good connections being made. Efforts are underway to make the selection process more accessible and interactive for our churches and pastors.

**Race Relations**

The Office of Race Relations continues to meet the challenges of assisting and encouraging our denomination in living out our identity as God’s diverse and unified family through partnerships by developing collaborations with denominational agencies, specialized ministries, the Reformed Church in America, and Christian Reformed institutions of higher learning as well as organizations outside the CRC.

Race Relations provides education and resources to equip our denomination to combat not only the effects of the sin of racism but also to facilitate reconciliation through workshops and materials.

We have workshops that can serve our congregations, classes, agencies and institutions in becoming more aware, equipped to do advocacy and align words with action in the ministry of racial reconciliation. Here’s a list of our workshops:

- Dance of Racial Reconciliation
- Widening the Circle
- Churches Between Borders
- Cultural Intelligence
- Leadership and Race

We are in the process of developing a new training called Raising Racism Free Kids. Please continue to pray for the Ministry of Race Relations.

**Safe Church Ministry**

**Connecting/Resourcing:** Over 200 interactions with churches and individuals were recorded by the Safe Church office.

Each month, over 300 Safe Church volunteers receive our newsletter, over a dozen prayer partners receive an update, and we post three blogs on our Network page: 
[http://network.crcna.org/content/safe-church](http://network.crcna.org/content/safe-church)
relationships. This day-long interactive leadership roles and how that affects this” and “don’t do that”. Rather, they provide the context for healthy ministry. Boundaries are more than lists of “do this” and “don’t do that”. Rather, they are a way of thinking about the sacred trust and inherent power in church leadership roles and how that affects relationships. This day-long interactive workshop helps church leaders from 10 denominations to examine boundaries in their ministry contexts. Safe Church has been involved in designing the materials and facilitating this pilot project.

Teaching at Calvin Theological Seminary – Safe Church appreciates the opportunity to address issues of abuse with seminary students. One newly ordained pastor received his first call to a church, and was alarmed to discover that the church had no abuse prevention policy. He recalled meeting the Safe Church Ministry director in his seminary class and knew to call Safe Church for resources, information and consultation.

**Today’s Lepers in Your Church** – This webinar discusses an increasingly relevant topic, the involvement in church of those with a criminal sexual history. Though no longer live, the webinar remains a helpful resource, [http://network6.crcna.org/webinar/todays-lepers-your-church](http://network6.crcna.org/webinar/todays-lepers-your-church).

**Sustaining Congregational & Pastoral Excellence**

Learning events are opportunities for ministry leaders to gather for a time of learning, refreshment, encouragement, and fellowship. SCE learning events see the pastor and three other ministry leaders from 12 smaller congregations gather to explore how the diversity of personalities and gifts work together for the kingdom. To date, 317 churches have attended an event—with the most recent one being held in Vancouver, B.C.

SPE learning events gather 15 pastor couples to spend time exploring their stories and how those stories impact both their ministry and personal life. An event—held in Toronto, Ont., in April—brought the total number of couples participating to 107. For both SCE and SPE events, topics are refreshed on a regular basis.

SCE offers Health & Renewal grants to smaller congregations. These are occasions for churches to creatively design a new ministry, or significantly enhance an ongoing one, that is uniquely suited to its ministry setting. Projects have ranged from leadership training to hip-hop ministry to outreach to seniors. A few months ago, 11 churches received grants bringing the total number of grants awarded to 209.

Peer Learning grants are available for pastors to gather with colleagues to spend a year exploring a topic of their choice, and possibly attending a conference or retreat together. The end of May will see a few more groups added to the 170 groups that have been formed. Since the program began in 2003, 74 percent of all CRC pastors have participated in a group.

Plans are shaping up nicely for the Pastors’ Spouses’ Conference that will take place in Toronto in September. This is the fifth conference SPE has hosted. The theme is “Face-to-Face: Becoming Brighter and More Beautiful (2 Cor. 3: 17-18).” One hundred attendees from Canada and the U.S. are anticipated to gather for a time of learning, sharing, and encouragement.

Centre for Public Dialogue and Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee

As good neighbors, we believe we have a responsibility to discern and engage with culture, and to participate in the seeds of renewal that God is tending. We’re convinced that some of these seeds are bearing fruit in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Blanket Exercise, and a budding movement for indigenous education reform.

The TRC is a forum for indigenous people to tell the stories of their experiences at residential schools. The Centre for Public Dialogue and Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee are encouraging Christian Reformed people to listen deeply to these sacred stories. Survivors’ stories are our stories because we are all impacted by the legacy of residential schools.

At the next TRC event in Edmonton, we are organizing a debriefing event for those who attend the TRC, in partnership with the Micah Centre at King’s University College. We are also connecting youth and young adults to the TRC through a writing and multimedia production contest. Finally, a short video is being developed to invite churches along on this reconciliation journey.

Momentum is also building around the Blanket Exercise, an interactive tool about relationships with our indigenous neighbors. We encourage you and your communities to experience this exercise as a step on the journey of reconciliation. We’re participating in a coalition to mobilize churches around indigenous education reform.

Education is a primary concern of indigenous peoples today. There are deep inequities in the current system, so just and meaningful reform is urgent. We look forward to working with a broad group of stakeholders and thousands of Canadians on reconciliation in indigenous education.

Work on the reForming Relationships art tour continues, as does the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force and the Do Justice blog.

**Indigenous Family Centre**

The Indian Family Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba celebrates 40 years of ministry this year. We have a number of events planned to teach, lead and enable people to continue to grow in the love of Christ as we experience him in Winnipeg’s north end.

In addition to changing our name by exchanging “Indian” for “Indigenous,” we have a host of dreams for this new phase in our history. Our new website and logo can be seen by visiting [www.ifcentre.ca](http://www.ifcentre.ca).

We are planning building renovations that will allow us to be more energy efficient and accessible. They will include a new kitchen plan in order to enhance the ability to provide healthy meals and teach community members...
how to cook. Catering will help us to offset food and management costs as well as offer people an opportunity to gain employment skills.

People are finding healing and hope within the sharing circles where scripture is read, the drum is played, and prayers are said. God is working quietly and gently, week by week. Beading and craft circles are also growing. Many women (and a few men) find their places at the table and talk together while learning ancient techniques and creating beautiful items together. Moccasins are for sale and the Christmas fundraiser was a success. We hope to build on this and create a full- fledged small business that will offer employment to area residents.

The hope is that as agencies design their volunteer experiences with these standards in mind, we will be able to respond to people’s God-given call to serve and pair it with meaningful volunteer experiences that benefit everyone: senders, goer-guests, and host-receivers.

A second way that ServiceLink is working to equip God’s people for service is by walking alongside churches, helping them identify some of the gaps for bringing people into volunteer roles and working towards the development of a thriving, God-centered volunteer ministry. Our prayer is that those serving within our churches feel confident and equipped and generate enthusiasm in their Kingdom building roles. We ask for your prayers as we build on this ministry with our churches.

ServiceLink

What does it mean to volunteer? Yes, it’s about filling a role of service, but it’s so much more than that. Volunteering is about serving because of Christ’s example; it’s about being that living example of the body of Christ; it’s about people being called by the Lord to serve.

When we look at volunteering this way, we begin to recognize that instead of using a recruiting mentality to fill a need, we focus on equipping God’s people for service and on their development as ministry leaders.

One of the ways that ServiceLink, as well as other CRCNA volunteer ministry programs, is focusing on equipping and developing volunteers is through the adoption of the Standards of Excellence for short term mission teams.

ServiceLink is part of a think tank group within the denomination that is collaborating on setting best practices for how we send out short term mission teams. The standards include things such as God-centeredness, empowering partnerships, mutual design, and appropriate training.

Calvin College

There are many recent benefits for which Calvin College is grateful. The 2013 – 2014 academic year saw good first year enrollment, with very high levels of academic achievement in the incoming class and growing diversity and internationalization. Enrollment numbers are again moving above 1,000 in first year enrollments and 4,000 in total student body. Fundraising for both the annual fund and for special projects are above prior year levels and above projections. Budget operations for the current fiscal year are going well, with both expenditures and revenues in line with expectations.

Since the fall of 2012, Calvin College has been engaged in simultaneous budget prioritization and strategic planning processes. These formally ended at the January 2014 meeting of the college’s Board of Trustees, where board members unanimously endorsed the new strategic plan, “Calvin 2019: Strengthen, Support, Secure” and the prioritization guidelines that form an important part of that plan.

The planning process has been a rewarding exercise in which Calvin College’s mission “to engage in vigorous liberal arts education that promotes lifelong Christian service, to produce substantial and challenging art and scholarship, and to perform all our tasks as a caring and diverse educational community” was reaffirmed. Also reaffirmed was the college’s deep appreciation for its unique and mutually beneficial relationship with the Christian Reformed Church. We are grateful that our denominational partner understands the college’s work as an academic expression of the cultural mandate to cultivate the earth and care for the creation.

The strategic plan provides the college with a five-year strategy to clarify the college’s vision and sharpen its program offerings and operations. This plan guides the college as it uses the next five years to plan for the next twenty, keeping Calvin anchored in its rich theological tradition and strengthening our commitment to academic excellence in a dynamic higher education context.

Calvin Theological Seminary

Different Avenues of Learning

Calvin Seminary is a place and a community of learning, but there are a number of ways that learning occurs outside of a classroom. Here are a few from the last few months.

Travel: Two special travel opportunities were available to Calvin Seminary students in January. One was a trip to Greece and Turkey led by Professor Jeff Weima. This trip helped bring the journeys of Paul into greater focus and understanding. Here is a link to a story written by chief financial and operating officer Jinny DeJong, who also went on this trip: http://www.crcna.org/news-and-views/walking-steps-paul.

Another experience that students could take was a trip to Angola Prison in Louisiana. For a sixth straight year, Calvin Seminary students under the leadership of professors John Rottman and Ron Nydam had the experience of visiting the hospice ward, death row, seminary behind bars and church services of a prison. Angola Prison went from being the bloodiest prison in the United States to the prison where the blood of Jesus Christ reigns and that is shown in the lives of 5,000 inmates that make up this unique community.

Worship Symposium: At the end of January, Calvin Seminary was a host site for over 1,500 participants for the annual Symposium of Christian
Worship. It is always encouraging to know how this resource has impacted the world and brings a taste of “the new heaven and earth” together in a unique time of listening and learning. Plan now to attend next year, Jan. 29-31, 2015.

Special Lectures: Calvin Seminary has 20 different nations represented in the student body. One nation is China. In February, Calvin Seminary helped host Rev. Ezra Jin, a pastor of a 1,000 member “house church” as well as the president of a seminary in China. During the course of Rev. Jin’s visit, it was clear that God cannot be contained by any “state sanctions” and that God is building his church in ways that are humbling and challenging.

On March 4, Calvin Seminary hosted Dr. Eduardo Echeverria who presented on the topic: “An Adventure in Ecumenicity: Berkhouwer and the Nouvelle Theologie.” Dr. Echeverria reviewed developments in Catholic biblical theology that led G.C. Berkhouwer to a reassessment of his earlier take on Catholicism and the Reformation.

Book of the Semester: The Giver by Lois Lowry has been chosen as the Book of the Semester at Calvin Seminary. Reading a book as a community has been one of the ways that we learn together and you are invited to join this journey as well.

Prayer Note: May 24, 2014 – Calvin Seminary Commencement D.V.

Back to God Ministries International

Back to God Ministries International uses media for proclamation, conversion and discipleship to build Christ’s church. As we share God’s Word throughout the world, the Holy Spirit transforms lives and communities. God completes the process as those who are growing in faith continue to serve the church and bring others into relationship with him.

Thanks to your prayers and support, we continue to see God at work around the world:

• We are experiencing a significant time of opportunity in the Middle East, a kairos moment in the history of Islam, as more and more Muslims are open to seeking the Christian faith. With energetic young staff members—some of them Muslim converts—we are developing a growing social media outreach to young Muslims. Through mentoring via text-message and Skype, these seekers are discovering the truth and hope found in God’s Word.

• Working in partnership with Words of Hope, the media ministry associated with the Reformed Church in America, we are making inroads into a predominantly Buddhist country in the Himalayan region. God is using our radio program and Christian music to connect with people’s minds and hearts. As the Christian message is proclaimed, praise God for those who have come to faith.

• Please continue to pray for our French ministry staff and the people living in Central Africa that are troubled by conflict. We’ve had to periodically close our ministry offices in Central African Republic for the safety of our staff and those who come to the center for discipleship. Pray for peace and justice.

• ReFrame Media, our English outreach, recently hired a new senior producer for children’s ministries. Ron VandenBurg, the first Canadian-based producer for BTGMI, will continue to develop the Kids Corner outreach, and explore new ways to provide faith formation resources to parents and their children.

Home Missions

Joining the mission of God, Christian Reformed Home Missions desires to partner with local congregations in sharing the Gospel with people across North America. God calls us to listen and discern together, that our eyes might be opened to see more fully God’s mission in the world. The next chapter of our journey will continue to center on our three foci:

1. Starting and strengthening churches
2. Developing disciples, leaders, and campus ministries
3. Engaging with classes, clusters, and communities

Home Missions leaders and staff have been working to refresh their work plans to reflect these foci by designing experiments and trying new things. Home Missions has been able to begin implementing this new vision.

Here are a few ways Home Missions is joining God’s mission:

• Home Missions is continuing to work with the RCA on the Church Multiplication Initiative (CMI) that focuses on the establishment of Kingdom Enterprise Zones (KEZs), places where RCA and CRC leaders come together to create systems and structures in order to be missionally focused together. There are currently 11 KEZs in various stages of growth and CMI is expanding to encourage 20 more classes – 10 from the CRC, 10 from the RCA— to develop similar collaborative relationships.

• Thanks to the generosity of the Kenneth and Jean Baker Emerging Leaders Scholarship Fund, Home Missions offers the Emerging Leaders program, a key strategy for developing new leaders for the church. This year the program provided one-third of the funding for a full-time internship at the University of Western Ontario. The program also provided part-time funding for seven student leaders to actively assist in leadership activities for a campus ministry.

• In partnership with Dunamis Fellowship Canada and Home Missions, over 125 people including pastors and lay leaders gathered last November in Guelph, Ontario, and Edmonton, Alberta, for the Growing the Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit conference. This conference explored practical ways for leaders to be nurtured and sustained in the process of cooperating with the Holy Spirit. Many participants continue to meet weekly for coaching and encouragement as they bring what they learned into their everyday ministry.

World Missions

As part of its long-term mission strategy, Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) focuses on strengthening young, growing national churches for outreach. The Cambodian church is one such church.

Many Cambodian believers are young and new to the Christian faith. Having come from families that did not know Christ, these young people have had little exposure to what it means to follow him daily. They are eager to help out in church and with outreach.
activities. Yet, they have little experience in discipling others or leading programs like Sunday school. The pastors want to encourage their growth, but sometimes struggle to do so since discipleship is new for the Cambodian church as a whole.

In response, CRWM offers biblically based leadership training initiatives to equip Cambodian Christian leaders for their roles. These initiatives include Timothy Leadership Training, a program for church leaders, and Educational Care, a teacher training curriculum. CRWM also focuses on mentorship.

Gil Suh, a CRWM missionary in the region, regularly meets with several young pastors interested in growing as leaders and as Christians. He listens to their joys and concerns, asks questions to help them process things further, and encourages them to come up with their own solutions. He also connects them with other church leaders and missionaries working to expand God’s Kingdom in Cambodia. As the leaders grow, they share what they’ve learned with others.

Step by step, Cambodian Christians are becoming more rooted in faith. As leaders grow in their roles, they’re sharing what they’ve learned about following God with others, helping more people to walk more closely with him.

World Renew

Thank you for your ongoing partnership with World Renew. Through the faithful support of churches like yours, World Renew can continue doing God’s work in North America and around the world.

Disaster Response

Domestically, we praise God that in 2013, more than 3,100 Disaster Response (DRS) volunteers donated 255,963 work hours. Volunteers are needed this summer in High River, Alberta (severe flooding), and Ocean County, New Jersey (Super-storm Sandy). In addition, many churches are taking offerings for DRS in March.

Internationally, World Renew is responding to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. Praise God that churches, individuals, businesses, and other agencies have given more than $4.5 million to provide emergency supplies and help communities rebuild through World Renew.

Community Development

Praise God that World Renew’s partner, Communities First Association, worked with 522 churches (including 98 CRCs) to develop North American neighborhoods.

Worldwide, World Renew invested a total of $11,600,000 in 3,755 communities in 2013—helping 462,061 people in poverty. Louise, who is featured in this year’s Embrace AIDS materials, is one of those individuals. Louise is a teacher at an all-girls’ school in southwest Mali where World Renew is working in a dozen villages to grow food and improve health.

Through World Renew’s health, literacy, agriculture, income, and Embrace AIDS programs, women like Louise are participating more fully in their family, work, faith, and civic lives—and sharing that knowledge and building relationships with non-Christian neighbors.

Advocacy

World Renew continues to identify and confront systemic injustices that inhibit community development such as gender justice, family violence, land rights, and climate change. Join the Creation Care Tour to Bangladesh this November to see firsthand how World Renew is helping subsistence farmers adapt to environmental deterioration.

Partners Worldwide

The work of Partners Worldwide is made possible by the partnerships with local institutions that catalyze entrepreneurs and job creators and celebrate business as a calling to do God’s work.

One of these community institutions is Stewardship of Christian Ministries, located in Nueva Suyapa, Honduras. This neighborhood on a hill is a vibrant, tight-knit and bustling community. However, they are not without their challenges, most of which stem from a large gang presence.

For over 15 years, Stewardship of Christian Ministries (SCM) has worked to bring Christian education to the neighborhood, support for healthcare, counseling for domestic violence victims, and mentoring and training for micro entrepreneurs. Since 2005, they have partnered with a business from Pella, Iowa, that has helped them grow a loan fund to help local small and medium businesses and mentored those that have excelled in the micro-credit program and have the capacity to grow. SCM currently supports close to 1,000 micro-enterprises and 141 small and medium businesses.

Erica and Madian, a married couple who run two rapidly growing small businesses—a taxi company and a sign printing business—are one example. They have six employees and feel the pressure that all entrepreneurs do: meeting payroll, sales competition and a rapidly changing marketplace.

But in other ways, Erica and Madian are not typical. Madian hired a few young men that other businesses wouldn’t hire because of their prior ties to gangs. These men turned into excellent employees—so much so that others tried to hire them away. Not only did the men remain loyal to Madian and Erica, but they often join them at church. God is good and His grace abounds.

We are grateful to God and to our global Christian network of Partners for the support and encouragement around our vision to end poverty so that all may have life and have it abundantly.

Save the date: October 30-31, 2014, we will be holding our Global conference. For more information: PartnersWorldwide.org/events.

Dynamic Youth Ministries

Calvinist Cadet Corps

One of the things getting a lot of attention this year is training in camping skills. International camporees come once in three years, and this is the year.

With large groups of men and boys hoping to reach Lacombé, Alberta in July for a week of wilderness camping, they need their survival skills intact. We plan to have about 1,200 campers come to the July 23–30 event. The theme for Kamp Lone Pine is “Branded With Christ,” based on Deuteronomy 6:5.

The training that takes place every fall
is complete, with two regional conferences (Michigan and Ontario) filling two successive Saturdays in November. Other training continues to go on in councils (a council is like a CRC classis) on a monthly basis.

Our attention to the new training in coaching and mentoring continues to evolve. About 20 men have taken the training, and are finding that coaching requires a different set of skills than does leading workshops. It’s been interesting to see men adapt to the coaching skills as they acquire them. Now we need to help them identify opportunities to use the skills they’ve learned.

**GEMS Girls’ Club**

GEMS (Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior) Girls’ Club continues to reach out to girls, bringing them into a living, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. This year’s activities focus on the theme, “Who’s the Greatest?” Twenty-four thousand girls and 5,300 women are learning and experiencing that God is the greatest, in so many ways.

For many clubs, the end of season activities include celebrations with mothers and/or fathers and daughters and a church wide praise celebration through GEMS Sunday – a highlight for many clubs and churches.

Upcoming events include the Spring Leadership Training weekend for cross-continent leadership trainers and area coordinators, to equip and encourage them in their area leadership and support roles.

This summer the ministry wide Annual GEMS Leadership Training Conference will be held at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., July 23-26. This training opportunity is vital to the spiritual nourishment and support of each leader who gives of her God-given time and ability to reach out to girls for Christ. Registration is open and we encourage church leaders to support their leaders in attending. The rewards are great for everyone.

The much-anticipated Get Connected! Camp for early teen girls is being held this summer, August 4-8, at Cran Hill Ranch, Mich. Registration is open and filling quickly.

As many have heard, Kathryn Miller, the GEMS executive director, has stepped back from this position as of Jan. 31, 2014. While our time together was short, we learned much from each other and we mutually pray for God’s blessings in each other’s next steps.

The GEMS Executive Board is in the process of determining who God is calling to serve in this position. It is our prayer that God would show His glory through this whole process and through the whole ministry. It is all His.

**Youth Unlimited**

The single most important thing that can happen in a student’s life is to form a lifelong commitment to Jesus Christ. After decades of doing youth ministry alongside churches, we know that faith-forming experiences are often a place where students discover God’s love, grace and desire for a personal relationship.

Youth Unlimited recognizes that youth are distancing themselves from the local organized church while connecting their faith in Jesus through service. Therefore, Youth Unlimited is passionately committed to offering 30 Serve youth mission experiences this summer across Canada and the United States.

There will be nearly 200 churches and 2,000 students and leaders participating in the movement of serving God by serving others. Within each experience students will spend time in personal devotions, small group discussions, worship, observing a broken world needing Jesus as well as serving others all while being cared and mentored by adults from a local church.

Youth Unlimited is eager to help your classis or church invest in students through one of these experiences and see students reconnect with a church family vibrantly living for Jesus.