SUMMER 2013

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry
We continue to see growing interest in chaplaincy, processing about one new chaplain endorsement per month, keeping our current number of endorsed chaplains at 130 – an all-time high. This number includes some who are provisionally endorsed and are still looking for a position of service. We are hoping that the number of job opportunities will allow all of these to become employed.

We have been busy completing arrangements for our annual June conference. We are expecting the largest attendance ever, maxing out the facilities of the Prince Conference Center. The theme will be “Chaplains and Prayer,” with keynote speaker Wendy Cadge, author of *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine*.

Phil Stacey, a Christian recording artist and finalist in a recent American Idol competition will provide a musical component to our conference. A Thursday evening event featuring his music plus the keynote speaker will be held in the Calvin Chapel and will be open to synod delegates, participants at the Multi-Ethnic Conference, and the community.

As we prepare for our annual chaplaincy recognition Sunday (2nd Sunday in June) we are hoping to increase the visibility of chaplaincy in the local churches and the opportunities for chaplains to share their gifts and stories with the congregations that call and send them into their service to the world.

Disability Concerns
Disability Concerns has co-produced a second edition of their Inclusion Handbook with the Disability Concerns ministry of the Reformed Church in America. We hope that users will find this edition even more useful than the previous edition.

Besides tips on interacting with people who have disabilities, this edition features brief articles on topics of immediate relevance to church leadership, including faith formation of people with severe intellectual disabilities, handling worship “disruptions,” including parents and children, and dealing with behavioral challenges.

Most issues related to engagement of people with disabilities span theological differences and connect us with fellow Christians across the street and across differences that divide us. The Handbook provides quick and helpful answers to many questions that arise.

In addition, pastors and others can share the Inclusion Handbook with others in their community at their local pastors’ associations and prayer gatherings. It is available for purchase from Faith Alive Christian Resources.

Faith Alive Christian Resources
Church Resources
With joy and celebration, Faith Alive released the new hymnal *Lift Up Your Hearts* in May. The culmination of seven years of research and development, this collection of 965 psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is designed to give a common voice to the worship of the CRC and RCA in the 21st century, to help us voice our praises and laments. Orders for over 11,000 print copies were received before it was released.

Reaction to the new hymnal has been overwhelmingly positive. Here’s a
The Banner

As The Banner’s annual loyalty campaign winds down, we’re grateful to report that donations from readers are running slightly higher than last year. This continues a trend since the every household strategy for the magazine was implemented in 2005. While most of the cost of publishing is covered by Ministry Shares, advertising sales and agency grants, a significant part is also covered by our loyal readers. We’re overwhelmed by their faithfulness, which is a source of real encouragement to Banner staff.

Another exciting development is the eager response we received from leaders of Spanish-speaking churches to provide Spanish content for www.thebanner.org We hope to post at least two articles a month from Spanish authors and have them translated into English, so that the magazine remains our “kitchen table” where we all converse with everybody.

Stay tuned.

Office of Social Justice

The Office of Social Justice has been preparing churches in the U.S. to respond to upcoming immigration legislation. Church Between Borders, a curriculum from the Office of Social Justice and Office of Race Relations, has been widely used to help churches understand the current immigration system and respond in faith. We are supporting and equipping Church Between Borders facilitators to lead workshops across the U.S. We have also published an immigration toolkit designed to guide CRC members through meetings with legislators.

This has become increasingly important now that there is a comprehensive immigration reform bill in the Senate. We are consistently sharing resources on immigration from economic, political, social, and theological perspectives through our social media and newsletters.

The Office of Social Justice, with World Renew, led an Environmental Expedition to Kenya to see firsthand the environmental degradation and effects of a changing climate, particularly on vulnerable people.

The group, consisting of scientists, activists, teachers, a filmmaker, and well known Christian environmental scientist Cal DeWitt, brought back stories, fresh calls to action and footage that will be made available to churches. Participants’ reflections are online at: volunteerblog.worldrenew.net/kenyatour

Informing our work and increasing our capacity is a host of ecumenical partnerships. We recently participated in Ecumenical Advocacy Days, the Symposium on Religion and Public Life, the CRC Prayer Summit, a Guantanamo Bay prayer vigil, an immigration rally, and hosted Jim Wallis, CEO of Sojourners, at the Grand Rapids denominational building. We facilitate staff, pastor, and congregation member participation in these ecumenical events.

We are also building a common justice voice for the CRC with the Centre for Public Dialogue that will address upcoming justice issues, share success stories, wrestle with tough questions, and remind us of our calling. Watch for the release of our blog, Do Justice.

Pastor-Church Relations

It only takes a quick glance at the congregational listings in the CRC Yearbook to realize the increasing role that staff of various disciplines play in the life and ministries of our churches. One of the attendant values is that staff be mature, competent and recognized leaders.

For the past few years the Staff Ministry Team (under Pastor-Church Relations) has been developing a credentialing process for non-ordained church staff ministry leaders that defines critical benchmarks of character, skills, knowledge and experience necessary to assure effective ministry. The SMT views credentialing as an important step toward assuring these benchmarks are realized.

The vision for a credentialing process began in the 1980’s and gained denominational support in 2005 when the Staff Ministry Team became a deployment team for the Ministries Plan Scorecard with a mandate to find a process whereby the number of credentialed church staff could be tracked.

A report outlining the credentialing process with recommendations for implementation was brought to the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA in May, 2009. At that time the BOT acknowledged and supported the test piloting of credentialing as a next step in the implementation of the process.

In February, 2013 the SMT requested the option of an accelerated credentialing path that recognizes and distinguishes staff who already have extensive professional experience and/or education in their area of ministry. The BOT approved the request.

The response from professional ministry staff invited to apply for accelerated credentialing was encouraging. In May, the STM granted provisional, credentialed status to 24 church staff ministry leaders from congregations throughout Canada and the United States.

The credentialing journey will continue this fall when the BOT is informed of the results of the pilot and has an opportunity to ratify the Credentialed Church Ministry Staff Program in the CRCNA.

Safe Church Ministry

Safe Church Ministry is a resource to churches in abuse awareness, prevention and response. In this quarter more than 350 interactions were recorded with churches and individuals regarding Safe Church issues. We’ve begun using key words as we track interactions. Of those that included key words: 36 were regarding policy; 60 were about a situation of abuse; 32 involved awareness or education; 89 were Safe Church team related.

New Safe Church Team Training Notebook – Helps equip Safe Church teams to fulfill their mandate to provide...
learning opportunities for churches. Ready-made presentations, with notes and handouts, are included in the notebook and on our website. Topics include: Safe Church Overview, Developing Safe Church Policy, The Advisory Panel Process, Boundaries, and Domestic Violence. It is our hope that Safe Church teams will make education and awareness a high priority in their ongoing work.

**Travel, Presentations & Training Opportunities** – Outreach presentations in new areas, and training existing Safe Church teams took Safe Church staff to California, Colorado and Ontario, with upcoming plans for British Columbia, Washington State, Alberta, and Michigan too. We are thankful for these opportunities, some in areas where there are no established Safe Church teams.

**Circle of Grace** – So far, over 30 churches have signed on to use the Circle of Grace safe environment program for children and youth. Safe Church continues to promote this excellent prevention program.

**An Always Improving Website** – It’s a wonderful source of information. Check it out at [www.crcna.org/safechurch](http://www.crcna.org/safechurch)

**Sustaining Congregational Excellence**

Learning communities and their importance are increasingly being talked about. Such communities see like-minded folks coming together to share what they know and to learn some new things. SCE and Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) offer a variety of opportunities for the formation of learning communities. Here are a couple of them.

Pastor peer learning groups see pastors gathering for a year to learn about: their chosen topic, themselves and their work as a pastor, and the importance of collegiality and support.

Recently, a number of grants were awarded to form these learning communities. They included six Chinese pastors exploring how to contribute to the ministry of the CRCNA, five pastors and their spouses focusing on understanding God’s call on their lives, and nine pastors working together to be more faithful to their calling.

To date, 71 percent of all CRC pastors have been part of an SPE peer group/learning community. One pastor said, “God’s gift of community is essential to spiritual health.”

SCE hosts several learning events each year which bring together the pastor and three ministry leaders from 12 smaller congregations.

Currently attendees are learning about the different personalities God has given to each of us and how they impact much of what we do as a church—from interacting in meetings to individual comfort levels in doing outreach. Through a variety of exercises, conversations, and presentations, those gathered engage in a brief but valuable, learning community.

To date, just over 300 congregations have participated. “The lessons learned at this event brought an awareness regarding others that I didn’t understand before,” reported one attendee.

**Calvin College**

The Calvin College board worked through a full agenda in mid-May, including a board development session with Whitworth University president emeritus Dr. Bill Robinson.

Robinson’s three-hour session surveyed the state of liberal arts education, board roles and responsibilities, and trust-building between college boards and campus communities. These activities are a direct result of the board listening informally to the community throughout the year and a desire to establish a strong foundation of trust.

On Saturday the board passed a resolution that authorized the president to appoint faculty advisors to key standing committees for meetings next year. These initiatives, and a several other board actions listed below, give us great confidence as we work toward a shared vision of the future of Calvin College.

The board also:

- appointed a new investment sub-committee of the Administration and Finance Committee
- approved the budget
- began planning for enhanced internal auditing and initiated a review of the current audit committee structure
- appointed new trustees David Schutt and Mary Bonnema (pending synod approval)
- reappointed Scott Spoelhof as board chair; appointed Craig Lubben as vice chair and Christine Metzer as secretary
- granted tenure to three faculty and promoted six to full professor
- initiated a review of presidential evaluation practices.

We have shouldered much this year and God is faithful. We are encouraged by enrollment with 50 more deposits compared to our total at this time last year. Giving exceeded our goal by 17 percent. We give thanks to admissions and advancement staff and faculty volunteers for these results, knowing that we are working with trust and unity.

Please keep Calvin in your prayers as we uphold its mission and purpose, with the ability to work, rejoice, and bear one another’s burdens as a community bathed in God’s grace.

**Calvin Theological Seminary**

**Commencement!**

Saturday, May 18, marked the day when 77 students were presented for completing the requirements of a degree or diploma from Calvin Seminary. The diversity of graduates is illustrated by the four persons who obtained a Doctor of Philosophy. These four students came from the United States, Canada, Japan and South Korea. What a blessing that is consistent with our student body coming from 20 different nations.

**Distance Master of Divinity**

We completed our first year of using cohorts (small groups), on-line teaching and intensive weeks of training to offer a Calvin Seminary education to people who continue to work, live and minister where they are. We are encouraged to see great interest in this new way of providing the same education as our residential program. Students are even taking a
class or two just to see if seminary is for them. Why not explore God’s calling for yourself or others by investigating this avenue? More information on the Distance Learning program can be obtained from www.calvinseminary.edu/distance

Transitions
The Calvin Seminary board interviewed and appointed Dr. Ronald Feenstra and Dr. Mary Vanden Berg to three-year terms as Academic Dean and Associate Academic Dean, respectively.

In anticipation of the retirement of Prof. Carl Bosma, the seminary board also interviewed and appointed Dr. Amanda Bencjhyusen (Christian Reformed pastor and currently a professor at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary) as Associate Professor of Old Testament. She will be interviewed by Synod 2013 and is scheduled begin her responsibilities on July 1, 2014.

Rev. Peter Choi, who has been serving as Director of Distance Education at the seminary, was also appointed as lecturer in the History of Christianity for the 2013-2014 academic year. Choi is completing doctoral studies at the University of Notre Dame.

Finally, the seminary board approved the recommendation from the faculty to declare openings in the areas of Pastoral Care and the History of Christianity (with primary responsibilities in the PhD program) in anticipation of the retirements of Dr. Ron Nydam (2014) and Dr. Richard Muller (2015), respectively. We invite the church to pray for the seminary as we conduct these searches over the course of the coming year.

New Forum!
The latest issue of the Calvin Seminary Forum magazine, Engaging the Church, will soon be distributed to churches. You can access the on-line version of the Forum by going to the Calvin Seminary website.

Back to God Ministries International
As Rev. Kurt Selles reflects on his first year as director of Back to God Ministries International, he notes, “I am convinced more than ever that prayer is vital to the work God has called us to do. I’ve met with each of our 10 ministry leaders and continue to receive powerful reports of how God uses their media outreach to transform lives. One theme keeps surfacing: prayer changes lives and empowers ministry.”

Selles offers three examples of this:

- Through the intercession of interdenominational prayer teams for the difficult work in India, God answered by miraculously removing barriers in a Hindu stronghold. One listener heard BTGMI radio broadcasts, asked to learn more, and received a visit from one of our discipleship teams. As a result several members of that remote village came to faith in Christ and were baptized.

- For many years, China was closed to open proclamations of the Christian faith. Today Rev. Jimmy Lin reports that after years of prayer, doors are opening for volunteers in mainland China to partner with us in producing and distributing gospel resources for people yearning to believe.

- Whenever Rev. Paul Mpindi leads evangelism rallies in central Africa, he is surrounded by a group of prayer warriors. That team of prayer partners has now committed to pray weekly—and sometimes daily—for local churches, for missions, and specifically for BTGMI French media ministry in Africa. A group of 600 believers from various denominations came together for a two-day prayer seminar, led by our French staff.

Prayer is central to the work of missions. BTGMI is grateful for the financial support from CRC congregations—without which we could not carry out ministry. We also acknowledge prayer support is as important as financial gifts.

The great revivals in mission history have been started through concerted efforts of prayer. Please continue praying and visit our new prayer website, backtogod.net/Pray.

Home Missions
God is on the move all around us: in our rapidly changing world and among our congregations and our denomination. As Christian Reformed Home Missions sees and experiences these changes throughout North America, we see the Spirit at work in the church, calling us to join in what God is doing. We are humbled by God’s persistent involvement with us and grateful that we do not stand on our own.

In the midst of all that our denomination and congregations are facing, we are setting a pathway to collaborate much more directly with congregations, classes, campus ministries and other partners as they seek their place in God’s mission.

We do this with a renewed practice of covenanting together to listen to and follow God in this world. We recognize that this requires new learning and practices. We are committing ourselves to learn and relearn how we can best partner with all those represented in our mandate. Some of these new partnerships include:

- Two new church plants underway in Livingston, CA - one a multi-ethnic work and one focused on South Asians. The planters are helping each other and working to lease a very visible building in the downtown area as a hub for classes, worship services, and small groups.

- On April 20, more than 700 women gathered in Oakville, Ont. for a Coffee Break conference. Titled “Making Room,” the conference focused on Romans 12:2b, “...be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The following week, the Black and Reformed Conference took place in Grand Rapids, Mich. Many leaders took part at the conference, including Dr. Bob Price, Home Missions Black and Urban Ministry Leader. In May, leaders from Campus Ministries across the United States and Canada met in Guelph, Ontario for the Campus Making conference and were joined by thinker, writer, and producer Andy Crouch. These and other conferences strengthen our leaders and keep them invigorated, inspired, and innovative.

- God continues to transform lives. In South Dakota, Pastor Carl VanVoorst and his church, Hope for Life, have taken root in the flourishing town of Watertown. Pastor Carl met Dave and Stacy, a dating couple, at Watertown Detention Center. Both were in jail for six months on related drug charges. Each week Pastor Carl would visit them and talk about
God’s hope and grace. When they got out of prison, he married them and now Dave and Stacy rarely miss the Sunday Service at Hope for Life and have even started a missional church group in their home.

World Missions

On June 18, 1888, the synod of what would later be known as the Christian Reformed Church in North America appointed a five-member committee to lead the denomination in cross-cultural missions. Since that day, Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) has partnered with the Christian Reformed Church to respond obediently to the Great Commission.

CRWM’s history begins among the native peoples of North America. Missionaries worked among the Lakota nation in South Dakota and then among the Navajo and Zuni nations in New Mexico. In 1920, CRWM opened its first international field in China. From then on, CRWM opened ministry in country after country, from Argentina to Taiwan. Today its work extends to more than 50 countries.

God has worked mightily through CRWM to expand His Kingdom. He has used CRC churches, donors, and missionaries to extend His message of salvation across the globe. Now, CRWM invites each CRC church and member to join us in celebrating 125 years of God’s work through CRWM in lives, churches, and communities worldwide.

CRWM has organized several events and materials to commemorate its 125th anniversary. Anniversary celebration events will be held in Canada and the United States. Meanwhile, Generations Faithful to His Call, an overview of CRWM’s history, will be available from Faith Alive in June. CRWM is also launching two funds, the Johanna Veenstra Missionary Support Fund and Henry Beets New Initiative Fund, to build support for continued missions efforts. Learn more about these initiatives and CRWM’s anniversary by visiting www.crwm.org/125.

World Renew

World Renew, formerly known as the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, responded to several spring storms over the past few months—including flooding in North Central Ontario, West Michigan, and continuing work on the East Coast following Superstorm Sandy.

In addition, World Renew-Disaster Response Services is transitioning long-term construction sites from Alabama to the New York and New Jersey area. The work in Alabama, which resulted from the 2011 tornadoes, has been completed, and plans are being finalized for the next phase of response on the East Coast. Work will also continue in Hyde County, North Carolina and Schoharie, New York, both resulting from Hurricane Irene in 2011. Efforts in both locations will continue through 2013, with one or two construction sites expected to open in the fall. A steady stream of church work groups is already planned for the summer months for that area.

For more information about volunteer opportunities and underfunded sites visit greenshirts.org.

Internationally, World Renew is responding to natural and manmade disasters in Pakistan, Syria, China, and more.

In addition to specific disasters such as those listed above, World Renew also needs offerings for its ongoing community development work—no ministry shares or funds designated for disasters are used for this aspect of World Renew’s ministry.

One way that churches can raise funds and awareness is through the fall World Hunger Campaign featuring the orange Peter Fish bank. This year’s theme is “Think. Act. Fast.” Plan now to participate in this educational fundraiser which is scheduled in CRCs on Nov. 3, 2013. For more information visit: worldrenew.net/worldhunger.

Thank you for your continuing support of the ministry of World Renew. To learn more about how your church can get involved, check out the latest issue of Through the Dust, which you can find on our website at worldrenew.net or by calling 800-333-8300.

Canadian Ministries

Last fall a team was appointed to review Canadian Ministries and to refresh and reframe the position of the Director of Canadian Ministries. The review focused on how it is that we can engage the local church in its mission context both locally and nationally and how the classis can be a vital part of that journey. The work was done in light of an understanding of binationality as developed by the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture.

Listening sessions with 12 classes in Canada were conducted as input to a review of ministries in Canada. About 700 pastors, office-bearers and members participated. Themes that emerged from these conversations shaped the proposed role of the Director of Canadian Ministries in significant ways. The top four themes for the senior leadership role were:

- Nurture and cast creative missional vision that inspires and is acted on
- Prompt missional engagement in our local and national context
- Catalyze networking among classes and churches to foster collaboration
- Ecumenical and social justice engagement

The report reflects on the Mission of God, the importance of doing mission in context and binationality and includes a proposed position description for the next Canadian Ministries Director. The report can be downloaded from the synod website: www.crcna.org/synod (click on “supplemental reports; it begins on page 13.)

The report was discussed at the May meeting of the Board of Trustees (BOT). The Board endorsed the direction of the report and referred it to the Task Force on Structure and Culture for reflection as it seeks to develop other positions in the executive leadership of the CRCNA. Their input will go to the Board of Trustees in September. If Synod 2013 authorizes the BOT to proceed with senior leadership appointments, presumably a search process can begin in the fall.

Partners Worldwide

Partners Worldwide affirms businesspeople and entrepreneurs who are called to use their business as their ministry. More than ever before, Christian businesspeople are being affirmed, encouraged, and commissioned as Christ’s agents in
their spheres of influence—their employees, customers, vendors, suppliers, and communities. They realize they have a critical role in bringing God’s Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" as they intentionally live out their faith and calling to transform the marketplace.

For probably 15 to 18 years of his life Jesus was a businessman—a carpenter. When he transitioned into fulltime ministry, nearly all of his public appearances were in the marketplace and a vast majority of the parables he told had a workplace context. Most of the disciples he chose were businessmen.

The spiritual impacts of a marketplace ministry are evident. Within the global network of Partners Worldwide, businesspeople are providing workplace discipleship groups or Bible studies, organizing corporate responses to local justice issues, or seizing opportunities to pray for Muslim coworkers—just a few examples of how they see their work as their worship.

Our work in 23 countries, with over 17,000 businesses, creating or sustaining 33,604 jobs this year, shows the economic impact Partners Worldwide has on the lives of individuals and communities. A job changes everything for these families. No longer dependent on aid or handouts, they have a sustainable income to lift themselves out of poverty, providing food, a secure home, education and medicine for their children and family members.

In the last year, Partners Worldwide worked through our global partnerships to empower thousands of businesspeople and entrepreneurs around the world to overcome poverty with sustainable solutions:

But, the story doesn’t end there. Often under very difficult business climates, these people use their business in Christ’s transformation of lives and his restoration of all things, impacting their entire community. Some are mentoring at risk youth, others are working to employ those coming out of the sex trade or out of jail—those our society sees as the least and the lost.

We have just released our Vision 20/20 plan that positions us for exponential growth: In the year 2020, we will catalyze and support 350,000 new jobs in communities of high unemployment.

Thank you for partnering in the ministry of Partners Worldwide. We couldn’t do what we do without the support of the CRCNA and we ask you for your continued prayers.

Dynamic Youth Ministries

Calvinist Cadet Corps
The last Cadet report mentioned that a number of churches have contacted our office because they are seeking an alternative to Boy Scouts. That continues to be the case as the Scouts recently decided that while they will not allow openly gay leaders, they will allow openly gay scouts. At this point, we are receiving inquiries but not gaining new clubs.

In the meantime, work goes on. New merit badges this year include Weeds and Wildflowers, The Great Flood, and Amusement Park Science. We are also expanding our plans for next year’s international camporee in Alberta. It promises to be a great time for all involved, and we look forward to honoring God in camp. Those who really like to plan ahead will be interested to know that we accepted an invitation for the international camporee in 2017. That one is being planned by a South Dakota – Northwest Iowa – Minnesota group and will likely be in the Black Hills.

GEMS Girls’ Clubs
GEMS Girls’ Clubs has been very blessed these last three months by an incredible group of GEMS women, girls, and faithful donors. This was evident to everybody who participated in and witnessed the GEMS Sunday. Thank you so much to everyone who participated in GEMS Sunday and prayerfully gave GEMS a financial offering. Your offerings will enable GEMS to continue mentoring women and girls into a living and dynamic relationship with Jesus.

GEMS is excited to announce two new curriculums for this fall, Kingdom Girls and True Beauty. If your GEMS club ministers to fourth through sixth grade girls from diverse backgrounds and varied settings then this new curriculum is for you! The 16 Talk sheets in Kingdom Girls use relevant language and the lessons cover everything from mean girls and culture’s lies to what it means to have an attitude of gratitude. The other new curriculum, True Beauty, talks about inner and outer beauty. This in-depth look at God’s idea of true beauty will engage your seventh and eighth grade girls. The 16 Jabberzines are short, magazine-like talk sheets that let you easily pick and choose which lessons fit your GEMS club! This is just one way GEMS equips women and girls for their walk with the Lord.

GEMS is growing internationally. In the last three months we have had new clubs in Papa New Guinea, China, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and the Bahamas. God’s faithfulness is being seen throughout the world. Please join us in praying for these new clubs.

Youth Unlimited
During March, April and May, Youth Unlimited has had two primary focuses. With great anticipation, our first has been the final plans and details of this summer’s Serve and Live It experiences. We anticipate nearly 2,000 CRC students and leaders giving about 40,000 hours of service in the name Jesus Christ. The majority of that service will be through the loving extension of 24 CRC congregations. As students focus on serving others and worshiping God, we are confident the Holy Spirit will do a work in their lives that will last a lifetime.

Secondly, plans are being made for the 2014 and 2015 faith-forming experiences of Serve and Live It. Churches willing to host a Serve experience are being recruited, marketing and promotional materials are being produced, devotional material is being written and more. In addition to our many Serve sites hosted by churches we are excited to have Trinity Christian College host a Serve Project again in 2014 as well as welcome Dordt College who will host a Serve Project in 2014.

Youth Unlimited remains humbled and honored to serve the Christian Reformed Church by helping your congregations challenge youth to commit their lives to Jesus Christ and transform this world for him.

Know that Youth Unlimited supporters, volunteers, planning teams, staff and board members are faithful in prayer and ready for a summer of faith-forming ministry.