WINTER 2012

Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

Interest in chaplaincy continues to be strong. We have approved two more endorsements, bringing our current number of endorsed chaplains to 129. The last few years have seen a number of chaplains retire, many of whom had started during a previous peak in the mid-eighties. But the number of new chaplains coming on board in recent years has significantly outpaced the number retiring, which has produced a new bubble in the overall number of CRC chaplains.

Another trend is that more applicants today are choosing chaplaincy while in seminary rather than transitioning mid-career. A larger number of new chaplains are also choosing to obtain a full four units of Clinical Pastoral Education rather than the minimum of two and are seeking board certification from one of the professional chaplain organizations. This reflects a demand in at least part of the medical community for more highly trained and credentialed chaplains.

Ironically, at the same time, budget restraints in other areas and a slow economy are producing a growing number of chaplains who are unemployed, underemployed, or working at several part time jobs.

The theme of our next conference will be Chaplains and Prayer, with a keynote speaker who has made an extensive study of what people pray for during crisis. So far we have arranged visits to four different student groups.

It is a significant indicator of the quality of our chaplains that, in the last few months, two of our military chaplains have received promotions and two of our civilian chaplains have achieved board certification.

Disability Concerns

Disability Concerns celebrated its 30th year of ministry in 2012. As we close out this year, we give thanks to God for his gracious blessings on our ministry and the on the church. In the past 30 years, many CRC congregations have

- made entrances plus other sections of their facilities accessible
- welcomed children with autism and intellectual disabilities into their children’s education programs
- started Friendship groups
- subscribed to Disability Concerns’ newsletter, Breaking Barriers
- supplied their members with large print bulletins and church newsletters
- provided transportation for members who cannot drive
- provided respite for caregivers
- installed hearing loops and provided sign language interpretation

Most importantly, some 600 congregations have members who advocate for the full welcome and inclusion of people with disabilities. These advocates form the backbone of our ministry and serve by increasing awareness and working with church leadership in ministry.

The CRC serves as a model for other denominations, according to a 2006 article in a respected journal on religion and disability.

If your church needs assistance in ministry with children or adults who have disabilities and other physical challenges, please contact your church or regional advocate, or call our office at 888-463-0272.
Faith Alive Christian Resources

Faith Alive Christian Resources continues to work through a challenging financial situation. Our ministry revenue plan is bearing fruit, but it will take time to see the full impact of those efforts.

A new field sales representative hired earlier in the year has expanded Faith Alive’s channels of distribution in new retail and online accounts like Family Christian Stores and Cokesbury, and Lifeway Christian Stores. Sales through this channel are up over 33%.

Banner advertising sales are also up over last year due to a focused effort to regain lost advertising revenue among CRCNA agencies. Long-term advertising contracts have been signed totaling over $120,000 in new advertising revenue.

To help manage its costs, the Faith Alive board approved a recommendation at its September 2012 meeting to suspend the search for a new editor-in-chief for one additional year. The search had begun last summer and is planned to begin again in summer 2013. Faith Alive is also watching and managing printing costs and its cash very closely.

Responding to the changing marketplace of denominational publishing, the Faith Alive board also approved the formation of an ad hoc committee to study and recommend how Faith Alive, in reclaiming its historic role in building faith in the church, could develop a structure to meet the vital need for faith formation in the CRCNA. This recommendation will be brought to the Faith Alive board in February 2013.

Pastor-Church Relations

Synod 2012 approved the following: “That synod instruct the Board of Trustees to develop ways in which the Office of Pastor-Church Relations or others, such as church visitors and regional pastors, can become involved more quickly in situations where tensions are developing within a congregation. Experience suggests that early interaction provides a possibility of healthy resolution that becomes less likely after tensions have risen to a breaking point.”

The staff of Pastor-Church Relations is responding to these instructions. We presented a preliminary paper to the CRCNA Board of Trustees at their September 2012 meeting. An introduction states that: “A primary challenge in the CRCNA is for churches and their leaders to recognize the inevitability and necessity of conflict within the healthy congregation. And, to learn ways to steward conflict so that it can lead to growth, maturation and a more vital ministry. Synod’s request for ways to intervene earlier may be focusing on the painful situations which cause a great deal of distress. But it might also be interesting to learn what level communities of faith are learning to engage their differences in strategic and constructive ways.”

The Board subsequently asked Pastor-Church Relations to provide concrete and expanded recommendations to the Board at its February 2013 meeting. To that end, staff is seeking to discern leverage points that can enhance congregational life, especially in the areas of developing healthy conflict norms and resilient, encouraging relationships. One observation to be made is that congregations are being called to live a life together that is both profoundly Christ-like and profoundly counter-cultural in a society of increased polarization and challenged relationships.

Safe Church Ministry

Safe Church Ministry seeks to create safe church environments by helping churches to prevent abuse and respond appropriately to abuse that has occurred. We have recorded over 190 interactions this quarter, acting as a resource to individuals and churches.

Circle of Grace – This comprehensive program is one of the best tools available for preventing abuse. The goal of the program is to educate and empower children and young people to participate in a safe environment for themselves and others.

Programs that focus on stranger danger are ineffective as most child abuse (up to 90%) involves someone the child knows. Circle of Grace teaches children to respect one another, to recognize when they are safe and when they may be unsafe, and how to bring uncomfortable feelings to the attention of a trusted adult.

We are hosting an information/training event in November and will provide free program materials to 50 churches that agree to pilot the program. Contact Safe Church Ministry for details.

New Staff and organization – A new half-time Safe Church Associate began work in November. We will now be better able to focus on developing Safe Church Teams and providing training, while also dealing with situations that arise. More collaboration with Pastor-Church Relations through a revised organizational structure will assist in responding to situations of abuse that don’t fit Safe Church definitions for sexual or physical abuse.

New Resource – A new resource will soon be posted to our website. The Advisory Panel Process: A Guide for Councils is designed to help councils navigate the difficult experience of handling an allegation of abuse against a church leader using the Safe Church Advisory Panel Process.

Race Relations

The Office of Race Relations continues assisting our denomination in the pursuit of a unified, diverse and reconciled church.

The workshop developed by the Office of Race Relations and the Office of Social Justice called “Church Between Borders” has been conducted with a good number of congregations and at gatherings such as the Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders Conference in Holland, Mich., and the Latino leaders Rencuentro gathering held in El Paso, Texas. We invest time in these types of events because we value relationships and want to encourage dialogue on the issues of reconciliation, justice, and unity in the midst of diversity.

With some pilot workshops having been conducted and the favorable responses to them, we are excited to go into full swing with our 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 become aware of their own life-long journey in cultural intelligence as they build their own capacity to improve their cultural intelligence. Leaders and congregations are being identified regionally to host a workshop in and for their communities.

Sustaining Congregational Excellence

“We’re all on a journey. No matter where we find ourselves, we can experience joy, love, and fulfillment in God.” So began the invitation to CRC pastors’ spouses for the Journey of Joy conference. Just over 100 pastors’ spouses attended the event which was held in Miami, Fla. Fifty-seven percent came from the US (representing 11 states) and 43 percent came from seven Canadian provinces.

Jerry and Renee Ritskes were the keynote speakers. Their insights into the blessings and challenges facing pastoral families were invaluable. The plenary sessions and some workshops were recorded and can be found at www.crcna.org/pastoralexcellence. Additional workshops included: Life on a Pastor’s Salary, Living Well, The Ancient Art of Quilling, and Classic Christian Disciplines.

Activities included wonderful worship, engaging conversations, a stimulating panel discussion, much laughter during the Amazing Race evening, adventure on the trip to the Everglades and spiritual nourishment from communion. Friendships were renewed; new relationships begun; refreshment, encouragement and support experienced.

One person commented: “This conference is a lifeline—an oasis of love and care that is needed specifically for pastors’ spouses and our unique role and concerns.”

And a pastor said, “Thank you for these encouraging and empowering events. My wife greatly anticipates them for months and then revels in the blessing she receives for months to follow.”

Calvin College

Over the past several months we have made the review of Calvin College’s financial position a high priority. Lower returns on investments, rising benefit costs, lagging faculty and staff salaries, and future institutional debt service payments lead us to conclude that we must begin to adapt to these new realities now if Calvin College is to remain sustainable and affordable. With the lingering effects of the recession over the past several years we recognize we cannot simply pass all the costs on to tuition-paying families.

Recently the campus community received our financial forecast and in its late October meeting the Board of Trustees commissioned a planning and prioritization process that will envision an exciting future for Calvin College, and help to focus resources on the priorities we identify over the next year.

The need to engage in this process is serious, but time is on our side and we are not alarmed. We work from a firm foundation: Calvin College’s Reformed Christian mission is clear and compelling, our academic reputation is strong, enrollment is increasing, and our ratio of assets to liabilities is positive.

Working together in our mutual desire to preserve academic excellence and serve our students well, we believe we can meet these challenges with a united and joyful spirit. We praise our God for his goodness over the past 136 years and we covet your continued prayers as we work together in ministry.

Calvin Theological Seminary

New Students: The fall at Calvin Theological Seminary brings with it the encouragement and excitement of new students. Last fall, 82 new students enrolled at CTS. This fall, 111 new students enrolled. We give thanks for this substantial increase.

Part of that increase is related to 14 students being enrolled in the “inaugural” cohort for the Distance M.Div. degree program. The “inaugural cohort” (small group) are enrolled in a five year M.Div. degree program that allows them to live and minister where they are while they obtain a Calvin Seminary education. For more information on this program, visit calvinseminary.edu/distance

New Staff: Rev. Jeff Sajdak and Sarah Chun have taken up their responsibilities as Dean of Students and Associate Dean of Students respectively. Dr. Mike Goheen has begun as Professor of Missiology and Rev. Stan Mast has in retirement transitioned from Pastor of Preaching at Worship at LaGrave CRC to Adjunct Professor of Preaching.

Stephanie Brooks has taken up the position of Admissions Coordinator and Cindy Kuipers has taken up the role of Development Associate (particular focus on West Michigan). Denise Mokma has begun as Academic Office Administrative Assistant. Finally, Rev. Albert Strydhorst has joined CTS as the Lee Huizenga Missionary in Residence. Albert brings 19 years of experience in Nigeria and that helps to shape conversations with students as he transitions from his role with Christian Reformed World Missions.

New Forum: The latest issue of the CTS Forum magazine, Engaging Scripture, has been distributed to the churches. Persons and churches can access the on-line version of the Forum by going to the Calvin Seminary website.

Seeking Nominations: Calvin Theological Seminary is receiving nominations for persons who would be appropriate recipients of the CTS Alumni Awards that are given at the seminary’s commencement in May 2013. Nominations can be made to sempres@calvinseminary.edu

Back to God Ministries International

Back to God Ministries International continues to spread the Gospel in 10 major languages, reaching people in
nearly every country of the world. In 2012 we had interactions with people from nearly 190 countries. Through your support of media missions, people who receive the message of God’s love are coming to Christ and growing in their walk of faith.

- In the Middle East, Muslims are coming to faith in Christ as they have access to Gospel truth through radio, Internet, and cell phone. We helped to establish Bible study groups throughout the Arabian Peninsula. BTGMI is also helping to connect other believers to discipleship groups in countries where Christians meet together at risk.

- Working with Indonesian Christian churches and several CRC agencies, our media team helped launch the Global Coffee Break Bible study ministry in Indonesia. In addition we’ve trained 214 listener community coordinators who assist with discipleship and outreach in remote areas of this vast island country.

- In spite of ongoing threats to the spread of the Gospel in northern India and the Himalayan region, our Hindi media ministry continues to share the Gospel with unreached people. In areas previously closed to the Christian faith, we are seeing answers to prayer as people come to faith in Christ and are baptized. Please pray for the safety of our staff and new believers in these areas.

A new radio program produced in partnership with the Reformed Church of Japan provides hope and spiritual encouragement for earthquake survivors in northern Japan. We are seeing a significant increase in the number of responses from this region.

Home Missions
More than 100 church planters, campus pastors, and established congregations are being reached in various ways. There are all kinds of stories that give hints at what God is up to in North America. Here are some snapshots:

- Three ministries are beginning in the Houston, Texas, area. In the north suburbs, Eric and Jana Schlukebir are actively involved in their community. Also in that area, Pablo Gaggero and his family are reaching those whose first language is Spanish. In downtown Houston, John and Chichi Egiege are planting an urban ministry. Please pray that these new planters will have many opportunities to share the love of Jesus with new friends in the coming months.

- God is at work through new Kingdom Enterprise Zones. The “zones” are joint church planting efforts between the CRC and RCA. 18 months ago there were no KEZs; today 20 new churches have been started in nine zones that are interacting with their communities, training pastors, integrating faith and work, building stronger leaders through coaching and other creative ways of moving church multiplication forward.

- Calvin Seminary and Home Missions are teaming up in new ways to further God’s mission. Among these are a joint effort to build a solid theological understanding of mission through conversations, a gathering of leaders, and an upcoming conference that will dig deeply into understanding mission in the 21st century. CRHM and CTS are also exploring creative ways to help churches get a fresh start in reaching their neighborhoods and ways to turn around decline. We are finding ways to involve classes in this walk into the future of church and mission so that they are empowered to carry out their calling in God’s mission.

World Missions
Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) continues to partner with churches around the world to share God’s message of grace.

In an Eastern European country, CRWM works with a Pentecostal denomination to train local believers for planting churches where no faith community exists. For the second year in a row, they opened a three-month Bible school this fall for new evangelists.

These evangelists have a passion for introducing people to Jesus. Many are recovering from various addictions and know what it’s like to be enslaved to temptation and guilt. Their experiences enable them to reach out to others in similar positions. However, while they have a passion for reaching “the lost,” they don’t have much experience in discipling people in faith.

At the Bible school, evangelists learn practical skills for ministry. They study prayer, preaching, family ministry, leading small groups, methods for evangelism and discipleship, and much more. When they graduate, the church planters have a foundation of skills for reaching out and mentoring people to follow Jesus.

Together, CRWM and its partners are sharing the hope found in Jesus with people searching for meaning and truth.

World Renew
(Christian Reformed World Relief Committee)
The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, now operating as World Renew, is compelled by God’s passion for justice and mercy to respond to poverty, hunger, disaster, and injustice around the world in Jesus’ name.

In 2011-2012, World Renew staff walked alongside Christian leaders from churches and community organizations in 25 of the world’s poorest countries to equip them to recognize and respond to needs in their communities. As a result, 913,003 individuals and their families improved their lives. Click here to read stories and watch videos showing how lives are being transformed with your support.

World Renew continued to respond to disasters and crises last year, including drought in Africa click here, flooding in Pakistan click here to learn more , tornadoes and hurricanes in the U.S., and flooding in Canada. Every time a need arose, CRC members responded with generosity. These gifts were leveraged through our international alliances to reach 946,492 disaster survivors.

Highlights: Click here to learn more!
- Responded to disasters in 47 countries and provided long-term community programs.
- Supported 76 community-based churches and partners working in
Canadian Ministries

The story of Canadian Ministries is about how God’s people engage their faith in their local context. It is the ministry of local congregations serving as part of God’s mission. We at Canadian Ministries are eager to partner to mobilize members for service. We want to:

- Mobilize members to demonstrate compassion by advocating for justice on behalf of the poor, the refugee and the vulnerable.
- Engage members to service opportunities locally, nationally and around the world
- Involve congregations in relationships with our aboriginal neighbours
- Work in ecumenical partnership with other denominations.

Visit the Canadian Ministries website at www.crcna.org/canadianministries

God is on a mission in your neighbourhood, throughout Canada and around the world. Let’s follow his leading.

A time of transition

Bruce Adema stepped down from his role as Director of Canadian Ministries in August. We thank Bruce for his service to Canadian Ministries, the ecumenical work and the regular communication with classes and churches. Ben Vandezande has been appointed to provide leadership during this time of transition.

Ben has two main responsibilities:

1. Ensure vigorous continuity of Canadian Ministries in its various forms. He is working with 2-3 deputies to help with that.

2. Review Canadian Ministries and particularly the role of the Director of Canadian Ministries (DCM) to help move forward constructively in shaping and filling the position. The process begins with a time of listening and learning. Included will be conversations with the classes in Canada.

The process will include a time for imagining and discerning options for the work of the DCM and preparing a report by mid-April, 2013. You can contact Ben Vandezande at bvandezande@crcna.org.

Please pray for:

- the engaging of congregations in advocacy, service and compassion.
- wisdom for the review process so that greater clarity and fruitful ministry will result.

ServiceLink

ServiceLink is transitioning into a new program called the Volunteer Services Program of the Christian Reformed Church.

Through the efforts of its staff, the program provides various services to the various denominational ministry programs, with a focus on marketing and recruiting volunteers.

Additionally, ServiceLink provides various services for congregations and their members with the new focus of promoting best practices in the area of Volunteer engagement.

In the past few months workshops have been developed and presented in different classes; resources have been written and posted on-line and new marketing tools have been developed.

It is our hope that as the ServiceLink program continues to transition, more and more churches will be encouraged in the discovery of best practices for engaging members in ministry.

Partners Worldwide

Partners Worldwide affirms businesspeople and entrepreneurs who are called to transform the marketplace. Christian businesspeople have a critical role in bringing God’s Kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven” as they live out their faith and calling.

God continues to work in amazing ways, as evidenced by the 400 people who attended our international business conference “Marketplace Revolution ’12: Business. Dignity. Ending Poverty” on Nov. 8-9. This gathering reinforces how God is working in and through the marketplace to bring spiritual and economic transformation around the world.

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

Research shows that jobs (not aid) are the sustainable solution to poverty. Our work in 23 countries, with over 17,000 businesses, creating or retaining 33,604 jobs this year, shows the economic impact Partners Worldwide has on the lives of individuals and communities.

The spiritual impacts are also evident. In Nicaragua, Isidro and Veronica Benavidez used to be desperate because land they worked hard to purchase was taken away from them three times within their first 10 years of marriage. “It was out of desperation that my husband had thought about illegally migrating to the United States to work,” says Veronica Benavidez. “But God had different plans for us.” They heard about the New Jerusalem land bank, one of three land banks that are a result of Partners Worldwide’s Farmer-to-Farmer partnership, and have been able to purchase their own piece of land.

Instead of a family broken apart because of poverty and injustice, Veronica and Isidro and their five children now live and work together. Isidro is a leader in the community and their children attend the Christian school just built on the site by the community. Most importantly, their faith has been renewed.
Dynamic Youth Ministries

Calvinist Cadet Corps
The Cadet ministry continues on course, with a couple items worthy of attention.

We have been invited, along with GEMS Girls’ Clubs, to partner with Christian Reformed World Missions in their TEA Conference in Uganda next summer. TEA stands for Theological Education in Africa, and it covers eastern and southern parts of the continent. We’re eager to see where God may lead with this potential opportunity, since both GEMS and Cadets already have a presence in East Africa.

Our training program, which we call DCE (Developer of Counselor Education), is primed to take a major step forward this year. Currently, we train counselors to: 1) Assess the needs in the clubs of their area, 2) develop workshops and learning experiences to meet those needs, and 3) deliver workshops in a professional and interesting manner.

The new training will add a new skill: coaching. It’s a different approach, because workshops bring a leader to a group of people. Coaching will put an individual coach in contact with a head counselor who is looking for help in organizing or running his club.

The new position will include some mentoring (giving advice based on experience), but is primarily designed to be coaching, which is more a way of getting the coached person to discover his own path to success.

GEMS Girls’ Clubs
We topped our record! GET Connected! Camp 2012, our international summer camp for early teen girls, saw a record number of girls attend this year’s camp held at Cranhill Ranch in Rodney, Mich. God continues to use this one-of-a-kind camp to help girls make life-defining, life-shaping choices about their faith.

Also in late summer, some 600 counselors prepared themselves for the new season in GEMS by attending our Annual Counselors’ Leadership Conference held at Wheaton College. Close to 2,000 others have attended one of our 30 training events offered across the US and Canada this fall.

Annually, the fall season brings lots of excitement as all 930 clubs gear up for the new season. This year’s annual theme offers an engaging study of Philippians 4:8 as girls learn to Think Right & Win the Fight.

A new, bi-national tour for girls, moms, and mentors began in Holland, Mich., on Nov 2 and will travel to multiple locations where large clusters of GEMS Clubs exist. The focus of the We Walk tour is to help girls learn to truly live their faith and care for others in a culture that encourages them to think only about themselves.

Youth Unlimited
Studies have shown that many church youth group graduates fail to pursue their faith after high school. Youth Unlimited is on a mission to change this.

Youth who do make a lifelong decision to follow Christ often cite faith-forming experiences like the ones Youth Unlimited provides as the place where God revealed His love, grace and desire for a personal relationship. Therefore, Youth Unlimited is committed to providing the time, space and resources needed for youth to encounter the risen Lord in this personal way.

We do so by assisting churches in forming intergenerational relationships with youth through faith-forming experiences for youth and their leaders to attend. These experiences demonstrate how Christianity is not a set of rules, but rather a relationship with Christ and a responsibility to care for the poor and use God-given gifts to further the Kingdom.

Reflecting on 2012, Youth Unlimited humbly praises God that through 2,076 students and leaders from 191 churches, 49,250 volunteer hours of service were given in the name of Christ to those in need across North America.

Youth Unlimited and a growing number of churches and its young people are showing the world the love of Jesus as testified by the City of Marion, Indiana, “Perfect strangers traveled here to build two houses for Habitat for Humanity, help build our new bus terminal, clean up parks, paint, help the Boys and Girls Club and work at the YMCA, CSA and many other downtown buildings. They were humble, kind, giving and showed us the power of faith in action.”

Will you join us in 2013?